Bolton Council

Report to:	Cabinet		
Date of meeting:	6th February 2023		
Report of:	Borough Treasurer	**Report Number:**	32703
Reporting Officer:	Tony Glennon, Borough Treasurer	**Telephone Number:**	x1723
Contact Officer:	Tony Glennon, Borough Treasurer	**Telephone Number:**	
Report title:	Budget Report 2023/24		

Not confidential

This report does not contain information which warrants its consideration in the absence of the press or members of the public.

Purpose:	To consolidate service budgets to provide the Council's overall 2023/24 budget; To consider the options for council tax for 2023/24; To report on the Financial Arrangements account for 2023/24.
Recommendations:	That Cabinet recommends to Council i. The budget for 2023/24 ii. The council tax for 2023/24 iii. That the Council Tax figures included in the report for the Mayoral Police and Crime Commissioner Precept and Mayoral General Precept (including Fire Services) are the recommended provisional amounts pending their formal approval
Decision:	
Background documents:	Provisional local government finance settlement: England, 2023 to 2024 Provisional local government finance settlement: England, 2023 to 2024 - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk) Draft Council Tax reports 2023 to 2024 Draft Council Tax reports 2023 to 2024 - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

Consultation with other officers

Finance	n/a			
Legal	Yes		Helen Gorman	
HR	Yes		Lee Fallows	
Climate Change	No			
Equality Impact Assessment	No			
Please confirm that the consultation response has been taken into consideration in making the recommendations.			Yes	
Vision outcomes Please identify the appropriate Vision outcome(s) that this report relates or contributes to by putting a cross in the relevant box.			1. Start Well	X
			2. Live Well	X
			3. Age Well	X
			4. Prosperous	X
			5. Clean and Green	X
			6. Strong and Distinctive	X

1 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.1 At the Cabinet meeting on 9th December 2022, members were updated on the current financial forecast for 2022/23 and the implication this had for 2023/24.

1.2 The original assumptions built into the 2023/24 budget include a 1.99% increase for the general council tax levy and 2% increase for the Adult Social Care Precept.

1.3 This report provides an update on the impact of the local government finance settlement announced on 19th December 2022.

2 LOCAL GOVERNMENT SETTLEMENT 2023/24

2.1 The settlement itself was a one-year settlement with broad guidance on government intentions for 2024/25 but no confirmation of actual local government funding from 2024/25 onwards. Key points to note for the 2023/24 settlement include:

2.2 Core spending power (the grand total of all the council's income) to increase on average by 9%. It should be noted this increase is based upon the assumption that councils will increase their council tax by the maximum permissible.

2.3 Services Grant 2023/24 (£2.6m) – This Grant was introduced in 2022/23 as one-off funding but is now continued into 2023/24 at a reduced level.

2.4 New Homes Bonus - a further year has been added, in addition to the legacy payment for Year 8 to continue in 2023/24 (£326k).

2.5 Grants aimed specifically at Social Care:

2.5.1 Social Care Grant - an additional £8.4m on top of the £15.2m we already receive. This will be used to offset budgetary demand pressures.

2.5.2 Adult Social Care Market Sustainability & Improvement Fund £3.3m to enable improvements to adult social care

2.5.3 Adult Social Care Discharge Fund £2.0m, provided to speed up the discharge from hospital of persons requiring social care support and to be pooled with Better Care Funds

2.5.4 Improved Better Care Fund £14.9m, remains at the 2022/23 level

2.6 The Council Tax general levy is permitted to increase by up to 2.99% without the need for a referendum.

2.7 The Adult Social Care precept can increase by a maximum of 2% without the need for a referendum.

3 SAVINGS PROGRAMME 2023-24

3.1 Given the considerable financial uncertainty, both nationally and locally, it was proposed at December's Cabinet meeting that a one-year budget be presented to Council for approval in February 2023. This will comprise:

3.1.1 Use of £10m reserves to balance the budget. This will mean that unachieved savings will be rolled forward into the 2024/25 budget cycle.

3.1.2 In addition, to achieve a balanced budget it is proposed to include savings targets of £5.2m, however there is scope to reduce this requirement as a result of agreement with our NHS partners. Bolton has a strong partnership with local health partners who recognise the value of Public Health and Social Care and the contributions to the local health and care system in meeting Bolton population's needs. Due to the strength of partnership and commitment to valuing social care, the Locality partnership has agreed to make a contribution of £937k towards Health and Social Care activities for 2023/24. As a result, the following changes to the savings targets are proposed:

Directorate	Original Allocation	Less NHS Contribution	Revised Allocation
	£'000	£'000	£'000
Adults & Housing	1,840	(260)	1,580
Children's	1,188	(200)	988
Public Health	477	(477)	0
Place	924		924
Corporate	771		771
Total	5,200	(937)	4,263

4 FINANCIAL PRESSURES

4.1 There are number of pressures outlined below which impact on the current financial year and 2023/24

4.2 Inflation & interest rates - since the 2022/23 budget was set, the impact of rising inflation, particularly for food and energy, has seen the UK inflation rate increase beyond 10% for the first time in many years. In response, the Bank of England has increased interest rates 9 times in the last 12 months or so, meaning household finances have become squeezed. It should be noted that, although the rate of inflation is forecast to fall during 2023/24, this is does not necessarily mean that prices will also reduce, merely that the size of price increases will be smaller than seen in 2022/23.

4.3 Social care pressures continue to have a major effect on the Council's budget with a continuing upward trend of increases in the volume in demand for Older People's care packages in the community especially homecare and discharges from hospital home and the increasing cost of external provision in Children's Social Care

4.4 Local Government Pay Award – the 2022/23 local government pay award averaged around 6%. The pay award assumption built into the original 2022/23 budget was 2%, meaning additional in-year costs of £5.2m

4.5 General price increases are expected to cost around an additional £3.9m in 2022/23.

4.6 Energy – estimated additional costs in 2022/23 are around £3.6m

5 GOVERNMENT SPENDING PLANS

5.1 As members will be aware, the council has had to find significant savings over the last 10 years, totaling almost £220m by the end of 2022/23 with a further £4.3m to be found in 2023/24.

5.2 Beyond 2022/23 there are still some key funding issues yet to be confirmed which could impact further on the council.

5.3 Fair Funding Review (FFR)

5.4 As part of the 16/17 finance settlement, it was announced that there would be an FFR of authorities' funding needs, initially to be implemented in 2019/20. This was subsequently deferred by one year to 2020/21 and the Brexit debate pushed this further back to 2021/22, the Covid-19 pandemic pushed this back further to 2023/24 and the expectation is that 2025/26 is now the earliest date of implementation.

5.5 According to the then titled Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) terms of reference, the FFR will:

- Set new baseline funding allocations for authorities
- Look at an assessment of needs and resources of authorities.

5.6 Business Rates

5.7 Bolton is part of the Greater Manchester 100% business rates retention pilot. Councils retain 100% of their business rates with 1% passed to the Fire Authority. The government previously announced that from 2023 business rates retention will be 49%, 1% of this being passed to the Fire Authority and 50% to central government. This has also been deferred until 2024/25 at the earliest.

5.8 The business rates reset initially intended to be implemented in 2021/22 has also been deferred until at least 2025/26. This may take the form of either a full re-set or partial re-set. What this means is that any business rates growth that the council is expected to achieve over and above its baseline may either be fully taken or partially taken off the council. The government's rationale is that the overall business rates growth since the previous re-set in 2013 will be circa £2bn (if it is a full re-set), which it can then re-distribute to councils. Some of this growth is likely to have been lost in the last two years. This makes forecasting business rates beyond 2023/24 extremely difficult to do. In addition, it is not possible to project what the council could receive in some form of re-distributed grant from any potentially available funds.

5.9 It should be noted that some of the business rates growth achieved by the council as a direct result of the GM 100% business rates initiative can currently be retained locally.

6 GM BUSINESS RATES POOL

6.1 As in 2022/23 no new Pool agreement has been entered into for 2023/24

7 EXPENDITURE FORECAST

7.1 Taking into account the above factors this is the expenditure forecast for 2022/23 and 2023/24:

	Latest Budget 2022/23 100% Business Rates £000s	Forecast 2023/24 100% Business Rates £000s
Expenditure		
Previous Year's Budget	448,866	477,797
Schools DSG Change	8,331	17,642
Inflation	8,303	19,724
CICT Pressures	2,000	
Levies	288	1,400
Other Corporate	-46	974
Corporate Borrowing	100	
Adult Social Care Precept	1,384	2,558
NI Increase 1.25% / Reversal	939	
Insurance	132	146
Energy inflation	3,600	
Price Inflation	3,900	
Indicative Savings Requirement		**-4,263**
Budget Requirement	477,797	515,978

Resources	Latest Budget 2022/23 100% Business Rates £000s	Forecast 2023/24 100% Business Rates £000s
Direct Schools Grant	220,302	237,944
Retained Local Business Rate	63,548	83,103
GMCA Growth contribution	-1,000	-2,500
Section 31 Grants	32,861	26,953
Business Rates Top Up	23,649	24,243
Council Tax Contribution	122,434	127,917
Council Tax Contribution - Adult Social Care	1,384	2,558
Council Tax Contribution - General Levy	2,436	2,546
Collection Fund Balance		1,362
Service Grant	4,699	2,648
Lower Tier Grant	466	
Contribution from / (to) reserves	6,688	8,878
New Homes Bonus	331	326
Total	477,797	515,978
Council Tax Increase (subject to Council approval)	3.12%	3.99%

8 FORECASTING CAUTION

8.1 As members will appreciate the current uncertain economic situation produces considerable difficulty in forecasting costs and income, the likelihood is that the UK economy will be in recession during at least the early stages of the 2023/24 financial year, recessions typically lead to increases in company failures and unemployment levels.

8.2 If a company does fail this has an impact on business rate losses and potentially council tax, should any employees qualify for support.

8.3 The government's levelling up agenda is intended to distribute more fairly funds across the country. This will only become apparent as the outcome of the Fair Funding Review is published.

9 RESERVES

9.1 The council estimates its reserves balance to be £158m at the end of 2022/23 excluding the DSG and Collection Fund balances as follows;

	01/04/2022	31/03/2023
	£m	£m
Reserves we cannot touch (schools etc…)	(17.36)	(12.53)
Reserves we must have (audit requirements)	(10.66)	(10.66)
Reserves to support the budget process	(13.30)	0
Reserves for known insurance claims / self insurance	(22.56)	(22.56)
Reserves to fund our existing capital programme	(52.97)	(44.17)
Reserves set aside for revenue commitments (Looked After Children etc…)	(91.79)	(68.21)
Total Reserves (excluding DSG Deficit)	(208.64)	(158.13)
DSG Deficit	+18.19	+15.24
Collection Fund	(9.87)	0
Overall Net Reserves Position	(200.32)	(142.89)

9.2 Appendix E provides some information of the implications of not holding these reserves.

10 FINANCIAL RISKS

10.1 Members will be aware that the Borough Treasurer has provided advice on the recommended level of Balances to be maintained previously. The full detail, including an identification of financial risks, is set out in Appendix F. However, in summary this advice is as follows:

10.1.1 Currently it is estimated that available Balances as at the 31st March 2023 will be £10.66m. The Borough Treasurer's advice to Members is that, as a minimum, Balances of £10.0m or higher should be maintained, based upon the Borough Treasurer' understanding of the risks and financial issues facing the Council over the next 3 years, and the proposals around the Budget, as identified in this report. Should Members wish to agree any additional items for growth or for savings not in this report, then the Borough Treasurer will need to advise Members as to whether or not those proposals would result in an increase in the financial risk facing the

Council, and therefore a need for a higher level of Balances to be set as a minimum. This will be subject to ongoing review.

11 BOLTON COUNCIL'S ELEMENT OF THE COUNCIL TAX

11.1 The government has stated that the limit for 2023/24 for the general levy will be 2.99%.

11.2 For Adult Social Care (ASC), the council can raise this by 2%.

11.3 A 1% swing in the rate broadly equates to a £1.3m gain or loss in council tax income. This budget has been prepared as follows:

- the Adult Social Care precept is set at 2.00% for 2023/24.
- the general levy is set at 1.99% for 2023/24.

11.4 The table below shows the basic charge per band for Bolton (i.e. excluding Parish and Mayoral precepts)

	Bolton Charge 2022/23	Adult Social Care	General Levy	2023/24 Basic Council Tax
		2.00%	1.99%	
Band A	£1,081.92	£21.64	£21.53	**£1,125.09**
Band B	£1,262.26	£25.25	£25.12	**£1,312.63**
Band C	£1,442.56	£28.85	£28.71	**£1,500.12**
Band D	£1,622.89	£32.46	£32.30	**£1,687.65**
Band E	£1,983.52	£39.67	£39.48	**£2,062.67**
Band F	£2,344.18	£46.89	£46.66	**£2,437.73**
Band G	£2,704.81	£54.10	£53.83	**£2,812.74**
Band H	£3,245.78	£64.92	£64.60	**£3,375.30**

11.5 This equates to an additional 83p per week for Band A properties which are more than 40% of the overall tax base

11.6 The amount generated from council tax is as follows:

		2022/23			**2023/24**	
Band D		£	£		£	£
Basic Council Tax - previous year		1,573.79			1,622.89	
Council Tax General Levy	1.99%	31.32		1.99%	32.30	
Council Tax Adult Social Care	1.13%	17.78		2.00%	32.46	
Basic Council Tax			1,622.89			1,687.65
Tax Base			77,795			78,820
Basic Council Tax Collected (£'000s)			126,253			133,021
Add Parish Precepts (£000s)			430			452
Council Tax Collected (£000s)			126,683			133,473

12 MAYORAL PRECEPT (tbc 27th January)

12.1 Since 2018/19 the Mayor for Greater Manchester has taken responsibility for both the GM Police and Crime Commissioner and GM Fire and Rescue Authority services. Greater Manchester Combined Authority now sets two precepts:

- Mayoral Police and Crime Commissioner Precept; and
- Mayoral General Precept (including Fire Services)

12.2 With regard to the Mayoral General Precept this is used specifically for initiatives to develop and enhance the whole Greater Manchester region.

12.3 Increases in the Mayoral Precepts are added onto the council tax charge set by Bolton. For 2023/24 the amounts are as follows

12.3.1 For the Mayoral General (including Fire Services) a £5 / 4.86% increase (tbc)

12.3.2 A £15 / 6.57% increase for the Mayoral Police and Crime Commissioner Precept (tbc)

12.4 The table below shows the additional cost on each band for the Mayoral precepts:

	Mayoral General Precept (including Fire Services) (tbc)	Mayoral Police and Crime Commissioner Precept (tbc)
	£5 (4.86%) Increase	£15 (6.57%) Increase
Band A	£71.96	£162.20
Band B	£83.96	£189.23
Band C	£95.95	£216.26
Band D	£107.95	£243.30
Band E	£131.93	£297.36
Band F	£155.92	£351.43
Band G	£179.91	£405.50
Band H	£215.90	£486.60

12.5 Should the final decisions of the GMCA be different, then this will be reported to Members at the Council meeting.

13 PARISH PRECEPTS (tbc)

13.1 The individual parish precepts are shown below with comparative figures for last year.

	2022/23	**2023/24**	**Increase**
	£	**£**	**%**
Blackrod	£73,847	£73,810	(0.05%)
Horwich	£204,559	£225,402	10.19%
Westhoughton	£151,178	£152,854	1.1%

13.2 As required by the Local Government Finance Act 1992, the Parish Precepts need to be added to Bolton's budget requirement.

13.3 The Council Tax bases for tax setting purposes for the Town Council areas are as follows:-

	Tax Base in Band D Equivalents 2023/24
Blackrod	1,986
Horwich	7,634
Westhoughton	8,799

13.4 The resultant additional Council Tax in each Town Council area is as follows:

	Blackrod	Horwich	Westhoughton
Band A	£24.78	£19.69	£11.58
Band B	£28.91	£22.97	£13.51
Band C	£33.04	£26.25	£15.44
Band D	£37.17	£29.53	£17.37
Band E	£45.43	£36.09	£21.23
Band F	£53.69	£42.65	£25.09
Band G	£61.95	£49.22	£28.95
Band H	£74.34	£59.06	£34.74

14 OVERALL COUNCIL TAX

14.1 Taking into account the Bolton Council council tax rise plus Mayoral and Parish precepts, the table below shows the overall charges to Bolton residents.

	Parish of Blackrod	Parish of Horwich	Parish of Westhoughton	All other parts of the Council's area
Band A	£1,384.03	£1,378.94	£1,370.83	£1,359.25
Band B	£1,614.73	£1,608.79	£1,599.33	£1,585.82
Band C	£1,845.37	£1,838.58	£1,827.77	£1,812.33
Band D	£2,076.07	£2,068.43	£2,056.27	£2,038.90
Band E	£2,537.39	£2,528.05	£2,513.19	£2,491.96
Band F	£2,998.77	£2,987.73	£2,970.17	£2,945.08
Band G	£3,460.10	£3,447.37	£3,427.10	£3,398.15
Band H	£4,152.14	£4,136.86	£4,112.54	£4,077.80

14.2 The overall increase equates £1.09 per week for a non-Parish Band A property.

14.3 A Draft Substantive Council Tax Resolution is set out in Appendix H.

15 COUNCIL TAX BILLING

15.1 The Budget contained in this report assumes that the Council Tax is set at the Council meeting on the 15th February 2023. Should the Council not be able to set the Council Tax on that day then a week's delay will put back the processing and distribution of Council Tax bills, which will incur additional costs.

16 BUSINESS RATES

16.1 Whilst the Council is part of the Greater Manchester 100% pilot, it should be noted that the Government determines the rates to be collected - the "multiplier" - and has set this at 49.9 pence in the pound for small businesses and 51.2 pence in the pound for large businesses.

16.2 All non-domestic properties are usually revalued at five-yearly intervals. From 1 April 2023, the rateable values of all non-domestic properties in England will be updated to reflect the property market as at 1 April 2021.The rateable value of a property is broadly equivalent to the annual rent that a property could be let for on the open market. These values are set by the Valuation Office Agency (VOA). A property's rates bill is calculated by multiplying its rateable value by the NNDR 'multiplier'.

16.3 Bolton Council's Rateable Value list as at December 2023 is £235.88m. This is an increase of 0.1% from the December 2022 list (£235.73m).

17 IMPACTS AND IMPLICATIONS:

17.1 Financial – see above

17.2 Legal - none

17.3 HR – see Equality &Impact Assessment (appendix I)

17.4 Climate Change – none

17.5 Other – none

18 EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT (EIA)

18.1 Under the Equality Act 2010, the council has a general duty to have due regard to the need to:

- eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by the Act;
- advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it; and
- foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it.

18.2 The Council retains its objective of seeking to manage all reductions consensually as far as possible in order to mitigate the impact on staff. Effective communication and

consultation with staff and their trades unions will continue to be vital to the budget process as a whole, as wee as to individual service reviews.

18.3 The EIA is attached at Appendix I

19 CONSULTATION SUMMARY

19.1 Between the 12th December 2022 and the 9th January 2023 Bolton Council ran a public consultation, seeking feedback on the proposals to make £4.3 million of savings. 634 residents reflected upon the proposals. 72% of residents agreed that budget reductions needed to be made; 89% were aware of the need for the council to change the way it delivers its services; and 34% believe the council is doing its best under difficult circumstances.

19.2 Residents were asked to consider where the council should prioritise cuts to services and five key areas were proposed. 96% agreed that the council should make better use of assets; 94% agreed that the council should maximise income from external organisation; 84% agreed that spending should be maintained for Public Health services; 75% agreed that a review was needed on staff efficiencies and a reduction to staff costs; and 63% agreed that a review of fees and charges needed to be carried out.

19.3 Residents and stakeholders took the time to reflect on the proposal to increase Council Tax by 3.99%. This was opposed by 68% of respondents. Those choosing to comment (63) stated a 2% increase would be a more appropriate rise.

19.4 As part of the consultation, Bolton Council were keen to understand what impact the proposal would have on residents and stakeholders. The top three areas of impact where around the financial affect as a result of Council Tax rises; the reduction of services not being appropriate or offering value for money; and the socio-economic impact for in work residents and those not claiming benefits. Job security for Bolton Council staff was also reflected upon. In addition, concerns were raised about the impact on other diverse and protected groups.

19.5 Residents and stakeholders were provided with the opportunity to make alternative suggestions of how the council could make savings. The three top themes suggested the council should revise staff salaries and make efficiencies; increase revenues and use more of the council's reserves; as well as having a more considered approach to spending. Of those that responded to the consultation, 91% live in the borough, with 50% of all responses living in the West of the borough. 54% of responses were from females, 43% male and 3% stating 'other'. 75% of responses were received from individuals aged between 35 years and 64 years. 20% of stakeholder respondents are limited due to a long-term physical or mental health condition or illness. 35% have caring responsibilities. 88% of responses were received from stakeholders who are white British and 12% from other ethnically diverse communities

19.6 The full consultation analysis can be found in appendix J along with the joint response from the trade unions (UNISON and GMB).

20 RECOMMENDATIONS

20.1 That Cabinet recommends to Council;

(i) The Budget for 2023/24
(ii) The Council Tax for 2023/24

(iii) That the Council Tax figures included in the report for the Mayoral Police and Crime Commissioner Precept and Mayoral General Precept (including Fire Services) are the recommended provisional amounts pending their formal approval

21 APPENDICES

Appendix A	General Fund Summary
Appendix B	Subjective Analysis
Appendix C	Savings Options 2023-24
Appendix D	The Financial Arrangements Account
Appendix E	Review of Reserves
Appendix F	General Fund Balances / Financial Risks
Appendix G	Council Tax (Non-Parish Council Areas)
Appendix H	Draft Substantive Council Tax Resolution
Appendix I	Equality Impact Assessment
Appendix J	Consultation Responses

APPENDIX A

GENERAL FUND SUMMARY

	2022/23	2023/24
	Original Budget	**Original Estimate**
	£000	**£000**
Children's Services	264,283	283,232
Adult Services	66,490	71,448
Public Health	17,469	17,821
Environmental Services	17,414	21,456
Development & Regeneration	7,177	7,503
Housing	1,266	1,502
Property Services	9,761	9,949
Central etc	28,477	31,954
Financing and Investing	13,545	16,352
Levies	39,607	40,747
Other Financial Services	4,807	14,014
Net Exp	**470,296**	**515,978**
Parishes	430	452
Sub Total	**470,726**	**516,430**
Income		
Direct Schools Grant	220,302	237,944
Retained local business rates	94,591	106,585
GMCA Growth Contribution	(1,000)	(2,500)
Business Rates Top-Up	23,031	24,243
Council Tax Contribution - Base Adjustment	122,434	127,917
Council Tax Contribution - Adult Social Care	1,384	2,558
Council Tax Contribution - General Levy	2,436	2,546
Council Tax contribution - Parishes	430	452
Collection Fund Balance	1,986	4,834
New Homes Bonus	330	325
Lower Tier Grant	457	0
Services Grant	4,699	2,648
Reserves	(354)	8,878
Total	**470,726**	**516,430**
Council Tax Increase (subject to Council approval)	3.12%	3.99%

APPENDIX B

SUBJECTIVE ANALYSIS

	2022/23 Original Estimate	2023/24 Original Estimate
Expenditure		
Employees	250,483	270,236
Premises	33,707	35,275
Transport	10,776	10,869
Supplies and Services	103,120	115,419
Agency / Third Party	195,064	213,988
Transfer Payments	92,596	94,410
Capital Costs	16,268	19,206
Total Expenditure	**702,014**	**759,403**
Income		
Grants & Contributions	162,893	171,231
Customer & Client Receipts	60,976	64,108
Rent	5,700	5,699
Interest & Dividends	2,149	2,387
Total Income	**231,718**	**243,425**
Net Expenditure *	470,296	515,978
* Before Direct Schools Grant of	220,302	237,944

APPENDIX C

DIRECTORATE OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES SAVINGS PROPOSALS

Children's Services Directorate

OPTION		SAVINGS 2023/24	ESTIMATED STAFFING IMPACT			
		£'000	FTE IN SCOPE	FTE DELETED	FTE VACANT	FTE DISPLACED
Service Efficiencies	Maximising process and digital efficiencies Maximising income opportunities across the directorate	318	0	0	0	0
Review of Youth Services	Rationalising current structures while maximising use of buildings	200	TBC	TBC	TBC	TBC
Review of Inclusive Education and Learning	Review of processes, structures and income opportunities	125	0	0	0	0
Contract Efficiency	Efficiencies across children's services contracts with 3rd parties	50	0	0	0	0
Review of Staffing across Childrens	Vacancy management across the directorate	295	TBC	6	6	0
Total		**988**	**0**	**6**	**6**	**0**

DIRECTORATE OF ADULT SERVICES SAVINGS PROPOSALS

Adult Services & Housing Directorate

AREA		BUDGET 2022/23	SAVINGS 2023/24	ESTIMATED STAFFING IMPACT			
	DETAIL	£'000	£'000	FTE IN SCOPE	FTE DELETED	FTE VACANT	FTE DISPLACED
Supported Housing	Review of supported housing properties.	14,744	580	0	0	0	0
Service Efficiencies on controllable budgets	Reviewing all the controllable budgets within the Adults Directorate and streamlining	N/a	450	0	0	0	0
Review of Transport and Charges	Review the transport arrangements and customer charges.	518	150	0	0	0	0
Reduction of Subsidy to Placements	Review and identify placements costs	207	100	0	0	0	0
Income Opportunities	Income contributions from external partners	13,208	300	0	0	0	0
Total			**1,580**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**

DIRECTORATE OF CORPORATE RESOURCES SAVINGS PROPOSALS

Corporate Resources Directorate

OPTION		SAVINGS 2023/24	ESTIMATED STAFFING IMPACT			
		£'000	FTE IN SCOPE	FTE DELETED	FTE VACANT	FTE DISPLACED
Review of Financial Services	Vacancy Management/Additional Income from schemes such as Salary sacrifice, interest on investments.	100	4	1	1	0
Revenue, Benefits and Customer Services &PP	Vacancy Management and review of Revs and Bens and Community Safety	131	127.72	3	3	0
Legal and Democratic Services	Review school admission appeals.	40	0	0	0	0
HR and OD and MEC	Additional Income from filming and Review of vacant hours	100	0	0	0	0
Transformation	Additional income for the use of IT services	220	0	0	0	0
Cross Cutting - Transformation	APM Software Optimisation	180				
	BPR - supported by change managers		TBC	5		5
	IT Related roles					
	MFD Optimisation strategy					
	Microsoft licence audit					
	Total	**771**	**131.72**	**9**	**4**	**5**

DIRECTORATE OF PLACE SAVINGS PROPOSALS

Place Directorate

SERVICE AREA	DETAIL	SAVINGS 2023/24	ESTIMATED STAFFING IMPACT			
		£'000	FTE IN SCOPE	FTE DELETED	FTE VACANT	FTE DISPLACED
Highways & Parking	Systems review, review of on-street parking and car parking (not a direct increase in charges), introduction of a dimming regime	50	0	0	0	0
Neighbourhoods & Regulatory Services	Agency Budget , no inflation except staffing	50	0	0	0	0
Community Services	Reduce Budget Contribution to Building Cleaning	30	0	0	0	0
Waste & Fleet Management	Reduction in vehicle replacement funding (Convert to borrowing), reduction in Agency budget. Review of the Commercial Waste service	218	0	0	0	0
Leisure	Reflect the current trading position	100	0	0	0	0
LMA	Review all budgets across the service with a view to reducing them	135	0	0	0	0
Cross cutting	Review of back-office services and systems	180	TBC	6		6
Planning Division	Increased income, pre app services	17	0	0	0	0
Strategic Development	No inflation other than staffing	17	0	0	0	0
Economic Strategy	No inflation other than staffing	14	0	0	0	0
Property and Heaton fold	Review lease arrangements, efficiencies as a result of the SAMP process	113	0	0	0	0
Total		**924**	**0**	**6**	**0**	**6**

APPENDIX D

THE FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS ACCOUNT

	2022/23 Original £'000s	2023/24 Original £'000s
Corporate Financing Costs	13,653	16,692
Transferred Debt	1,507	1,507
Interest and Contributions	-145	-377
Airport Dividend	0	0
Airport Rents	-414	-414
Airport Loan Interest	-1,076	-1,076
Debt Management	20	20
Total Financing and Investing	13,545	16,352
Levies	39,607	40,747
Former Employee Pensions	852	852
Car Parks	-350	-350
Miscellaneous	679	4,982
Apprenticeship Ley	500	500
Other	3127	8,031
Sub-total	4808	14,015
Financing		
Use of Reserves	353	-8,878
Low Tier Grant	-457	0
LTCS Support Grant	0	0
GMCA Growth Contribution	1,000	2,500
Services Grant	-4,699	-2,648
New Homes Bonus	-331	-326
Total Miscellaneous	-4,134	-9,352
Total	53,826	61,762

APPENDIX E

RESERVES

Revenue Impact of not holding key Reserves

If we were not to hold these reserves, then there would be a direct impact on the Revenue Budget in the order of £6m. This would be from having to provide a Contingency Budget to meet certain risks or additional costs that the Council will be facing in the future. These are set out below:-

	£m
ICT replacements (would need an annual contribution to meet these costs)	2.0
Redundancy/redeployment (if we did not hold Reserves we would have to capitalise these costs – if Government agree)	2.0
Corporate contingencies – Energy etc. (would need a specific Contingency provision)	1.0
Service contingencies (would need a specific contingency provision)	1.0
	6.0

APPENDIX F

GENERAL FUND BALANCES

Report to:	Cabinet		
Date of meeting:	6th February 2023		
Report of:	Borough Treasurer	**Report number:**	32704
Contact officer:	Tony Glennon	**Telephone number**	
Report title:	General Fund Balances 2023/24		
Not confidential This report does not contain information which warrants its consideration in the absence of the press or members of the public.			
Purpose:	To outline the Borough Treasurer' advice on the Financial Risks facing the Council and the appropriate level of Balances to be maintained		
Recommendations:	That the minimum level of Balances for 2023/24 should be £10.0m or higher if possible.		
Decision:			
Background documents:			
Date:			

Consultation with other officers		
Finance	Yes	Tony Glennon
Legal	No	
HR	No	
Equality Impact Assessment required?	No	
(a) Pre-consultation reports Is there a need to consult on the proposals? **(b) Post consultation reports** Please confirm that the consultation response has been taken into consideration in making the recommendations.		No No

Vision outcomes Please identify the appropriate Vision outcome(s) that this report relates or contributes to by putting a cross in the relevant box.		
	1. Start Well	X
	2.Live Well	X
	3.Age Well	X
	4.Prosperous	X
	5. Clean and Green	X
	6.Strong and Distinctive	X

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Council maintains two types of revenue reserves, earmarked reserves and general reserves (Balances). Earmarked reserves are set aside for specific purposes/ commitments whereas general Balances are maintained to support the overall Council's cash-flow and meet any unforeseen contingencies/demands.

1.2 This report considers the current level of general Balances, evaluates the reasons why Balances are maintained (i.e. the general financial risks facing the Council) and provides advice on the appropriate level of Balances to be maintained by the Council in the light of Guidance from the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA).

2 NEED FOR GENERAL BALANCES

2.1 Whilst the Council's annual Budget provides resources to meet any known liabilities or expenditure requirements, Balances are amounts which are set aside to meet unexpected changes in the Budget and to finance demands for resources which cannot be predicted and are assessed on the basis of the general financial risks facing the Council.

2.2 The requirement for Balances is acknowledged in statute with Section 32 of the 1992 Local Government Finance Act requiring Authorities to have regard to the level of Balances needed to meet estimated future liabilities when calculating their Budget requirement. The Chief Finance Officer has the responsibility to ensure that the Council maintains a balanced Budget with powers under Section 114 of the 1998 Local Government Finance Act to report to the Council should its liabilities be in danger of exceeding its resources. Equally, the External Auditor has a responsibility to review and report on the Council's financial standing. Further requirements within the 2003 Local Government Finance Act reinforce the above with additional monitoring and reporting responsibilities.

2.3 In drawing together the Council's capital and revenue budgets and the Medium-Term Financial Statement, the level of general Balances and Financial Risks are always carefully considered. The provision of an appropriate level of Balances is therefore a fundamental part of prudent financial management.

3 MINIMUM LEVEL OF RESERVES

3.1 Authorities should maintain Balances equivalent to 3% of their Budget, for 2023/24 this would amount to approximately £14.3m. However, whilst this is recommended guidance, the decision on the appropriate level of Balances is one for the Council, with advice from the Borough Treasurer, to determine. There are several factors/financial risks that need to be taken into account in considering what is a prudent level of Balances:

3.2 Revenue Contingencies

3.2.1 The Council does not maintain a general contingency within its revenue budget but relies on in year savings and Balances to meet any unexpected demands. For example, a pay increase of 0.5% more than that allowed for in the Budget would cost approximately £0.6m, excluding Teachers. A price variation of 0.5% would cost approximately £1m.

3.3 Interest

3.3.1 In recent years the Council has been successful in managing the interest that it pays out/receives and savings in this area have generally added to Balances. During 2022/23 the Bank of England has increased interest rates repeatedly in response to rising inflation, from a historic low of 0.1% in November 2021 to 3.5% in December 2022, with further increases expected.

3.4 Capital

3.4.1 The Council's capital programme including the Town Hall Strategy is in the order of £232m. Within the capital programme there are no contingencies and whilst the programme is actively monitored and managed, there is the potential for a demand on Balances from any capital overspend. In addition, because of the economic climate there has been difficulties in generating a level of capital receipts contribution to fund the capital programme.

3.5 Economic Climate

3.5.1 The challenging economic climate continues to create pressures for the Council in several ways. Demand for services, particularly those to support the elderly and looked after children is continuing to increase, in addition, several of the income/revenue streams may be affected by reduced demand/take up. A CPI inflation rate at a 40 year high during 2022/23 has led to significant cost pressures, particularly for energy and fuel costs. The above items have been reflected in the budget but the change in demand cannot be absolutely forecast and therefore there may be changes in cost/income levels during the year.

3.6 Council Tax Support Scheme

3.6.1 From 1st April 2013 the Council introduced a Local Council Tax Support Scheme. The full risk of increasing numbers of claimants and greater individual claimant eligibility remains within the Council and is a risk to the Council's resources

3.7 Local Business Rates

3.7.1 Prior to 2013, all business rates collected by local authorities were paid over to the Government. This money was distributed back to local authorities by the Government in the form of grants.

3.7.2 From 2013 local authorities could retain up to 50% of business rates collected (the 'local' share) with the remaining 50% (the 'central' share) paid to the Government. This central share was distributed back to councils in the form of reduced grants. The Government introduced a system of top-ups and tariffs to redistribute income between councils so that councils with higher needs or less capacity to raise their own business rates were compensated.

3.7.3 In April 2017, Greater Manchester local authorities formed the Greater Manchester 100% Business Rates Retention Pilot. There was a corresponding reduction in government grants to reflect the increase in retained business rates.

3.7.4 A move to a 100% retention scheme doubles the risk to a council of a loss of income due to non-collection. In the current economic climate this risk is significant. For 2023/24 Bolton Council's share of the provision set aside and charged against revenue is estimated at £2.6m. The Government provides an overall safety net that

is designed to protect councils if their business rates income falls significantly in the year – however the safety net is set at 97% of a council's baseline funding level (in the case of Bolton Council this represents a loss of approximately £9.4m before safety net is triggered) – the Council may potentially have to cover losses up to this amount from its General Balances.

3.8 Un-predictable Demand Led Expenditure

3.8.1 Major parts of the Council's Budget, particularly in Social Care Services and Education are "demand led" and as we have seen in previous years, can create significant demands for increased expenditure during the year. Services maintain modest Reserves of their own, to meet minor Budget variations.

3.9 Emergencies

3.9.1 The Council is required to maintain provision to meet the cost of emergencies that cannot be met from main Budgets or by Insurance. Significant costs on emergencies are met by Central Government under the "Bellwin Scheme" but these are only triggered once the Council's expenditure has exceeded a pre-determined limit (0.1% of the revenue budget which is approximately £430k). Costs above this limit are covered by Central Government but only up to 85%.

3.10 Unexpected Demands

3.10.1 Balances also need to provide sufficient resources to meet unexpected demands, particularly those that result from a legal decision, a change in Government legislation or a determination of Government legislation. In the past the Council has had to fund several major issues of this nature.

3.11 Service Deficits

3.11.1 Balances are also required to offset any Budget deficits carried forward or generated during the year by services as allowed under Financial Regulations.

3.12 General Risks

3.12.1 It is also important to weigh up the general risks facing the Council and evaluate what any potential financial impact may result from these risks. The Borough Treasurer and the Head of Internal Audit and Risk have undertaken a review of these risks. The areas with a potentially significant financial impact are as follows:

- Economic Climate
- Changes in Government Funding
- Potential Legal Claims
- External Suppliers going into Administration

3.13 These have been taken into account in the overall evaluation of the minimum level of Balances to maintain.

4 REVIEW OF 2022/23 BALANCES POSITION

4.1 The last quarterly report estimated available Balances at 31st March 2023 at £10.7m. It is difficult to predict whether the economic climate will add further to the demands on the Council's services or reduce further the income we receive. On this basis I am

recommending that the current minimum level of Balances remain at £10.7m in 2023/24.

5 BOROUGH TREASURER ADVICE ON THE MINIMUM LEVEL OF BALANCES

5.1 Section 25 of the Local Government Act 2003 requires the Section 151 Officer (Borough Treasurer) to report to the Council when it is setting its Budget/Council Tax on the "robustness of the estimates" and the "adequacy of the reserves".

5.2 Equally the Council should not hold usable Balances at too high a level as this would not be making the most effective use of the Council's overall resources when faced with significant demands for increased levels of service. Even allowing for a recommended level of Balances of £14m above, Balances of up to £18m would not be regarded as inappropriate.

5.3 At this point in time, bearing in mind the above and the size of the Council's Budget at approximately £494m, I would recommend that a minimum level of Balances for the Council to maintain would be £10m (but if possible should be at a higher level).

6 USE OF BALANCES

6.1 Any future use of Balances above the recommended level is best used to support "one off" initiatives/investment. Any significant use of Balances to meet the on-going costs of services should only be considered on the basis of providing a Revenue contribution for the period of the Medium-Term Financial Strategy.

7 SUMMARY

7.1 The report has set out the various factors that influence the level of Balances which must be maintained to meet any unexpected increases in expenditure or shortfall in income during the year. The Borough Treasurer's advice is that as a minimum Balances should be maintained at £10m but if possible should be at a higher level.

APPENDIX G

COUNCIL TAX (NON_PARISH AREAS INCLUDING POLICE & MAYORAL GENERAL)

	Properties	2022/23	2023/24	Increase
	%			
Band A	44.95	£1,302.75	£1,359.25	4.34%
Band B	18.67	£1,519.89	£1,585.82	4.34%
Band C	16.75	£1,737.00	£1,812.33	4.34%
Band D	9.94	£1,954.14	£2,038.90	4.34%
Band E	5.41	£2,388.37	£2,491.96	4.34%
Band F	2.24	£2,822.64	£2,945.08	4.34%
Band G	1.82	£3,256.89	£3,398.15	4.34%
Band H	0.22	£3,908.28	£4,077.80	4.34%

The Mayoral Police and Crime Commissioner Precept in percentage terms equates to a 6.6% increase

The Mayoral General Precept (including Fire Services) is a 4.9% increase

The tables below show how the cumulative element of the Adult Social Care precept needs to be shown on council tax bills

Band A	Basic Council Tax	Adult Social Care Precept	Total	% Increase
2022/23 Council Tax Base (excl Precepts)	£953.39		£953.39	
2016/17 Adult Social Care Precept		£17.02	£17.02	
2017/18 Adult Social Care Precept		£26.43	£26.43	
2018/19 Adult Social Care Precept		£18.46	£18.46	
2019/20 Adult Social Care Precept		£9.69	£9.69	
2020/21 Adult Social Care Precept		£19.81	£19.81	
2021/22 Adult Social Care Precept		£25.27	£25.27	
2022/23 Adult Social Care Precept		£11.85	£11.85	
2022/23 Council Tax Base	£953.39	£128.53	£1,081.92	
General Levy 2023/24	£21.53		£21.53	1.99%
Adult Social Care Precept Levy 2023/24		£21.64	£21.64	2.00%
Total 2023/24 (excluding Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) Precepts)	£974.92	£150.17	£1,125.09	
GMCA Precepts				
Mayoral Police and Crime Commissioner Precept			£162.20	
Mayoral General Precept (including Fire Services)			£71.96	
Total Charge 2023/24	**£974.92**	**£150.17**	**£1,359.25**	
	This will appear as an item on the Council Tax bill	This will appear as an item on the Council Tax bill		

APPENDIX G (cont'd)

Band D	Basic Council Tax	Adult Social Care Precept	Total	% Increase
2022/23 Council Tax Base (excl Precepts)	£1,430.09		£1,430.09	
2016/17 Adult Social Care Precept		£25.53	£25.53	
2017/18 Adult Social Care Precept		£39.64	£39.64	
2018/19 Adult Social Care Precept		£27.69	£27.69	
2019/20 Adult Social Care Precept		£14.54	£14.54	
2020/21 Adult Social Care Precept		£29.72	£29.72	
2021/22 Adult Social Care Precept		£37.90	£37.90	
2022/23 Adult Social Care Precept		£17.78	£17.78	
2022/23 Council Tax Base	£1,430.09	£192.80	£1,622.89	
General Levy 2023/24	£32.30		£32.30	1.99%
Adult Social Care Precept Levy 2023/24		£32.46	£32.46	2.00%
	£1,462.39	£225.26	£1,687.65	
Combined Authority (GMCA) Precepts				
GMCA Precepts				
Mayoral Police and Crime Commissioner Precept			£243.30	
Mayoral General Precept (including Fire Services)			£107.95	
Total Charge 2023/24	**£1,462.39**	**£225.26**	**£2,038.90**	
	This will appear as an item on the Council Tax bill	This will appear as an item on the Council Tax bill		

APPENDIX H

DRAFT SUBSTANTIVE COUNCIL TAX RESOLUTION

(i) That the following recommendations of the Cabinet on 6th February 2023 be approved:-

(a) The Council be recommended to approve the Budget for 2023/24
(b) That the council tax for 2023/24 be increased by 3.99% comprising
- The Adult Social Care Precept at 2.00%
- The general levy at 1.99%

(c) The Council be recommended to approve the Capital Programme and Strategy for 2023/24
(d) The Council be recommended to approve the Investment and Prudential Indicators and Treasury Strategies 2023/24 to 2025/26

(ii) It be noted that on 12th December 2022 the Cabinet calculated

(a) the Council Tax Base 2023/24 for the whole Council area as 78,820 (item T in the formula in Section 31B of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, as amended (the "Act"); and
(b) for dwellings in those parts of its area to which a Parish precept relates as:

Parish Councils

The Parish of Blackrod	1,986	Band D equivalents
The Parish of Horwich	7,634	Band D equivalents
The Parish of Westhoughton	8,799	Band D Equivalents

being the amounts calculated by the Council, in accordance with regulation 6 of the Regulations, as the amounts of its Council Tax base for the year 2023/24 for dwellings in those parts of its area to which one or more special items relate.

(iii) Calculate that the Council Tax requirement for the Council's own purposes for 2023/24 (excluding Parish precepts) is £133,021,282

(iv) That the following amounts be calculated for the year 2023/24 in accordance with Sections 31 to 36 of the Act.

(a)	£278,486,088	being the aggregate of the amounts which the Council estimates for the items set out in Section 31A(2) of the Act taking into account all precepts issued to it by Parish Councils.
(b)	£145,012,740	being the aggregate of the amounts which the Council estimates for the items set out in Section 31A(3) of the Act.
(c)	£133,473,348	being the amount by which the aggregate at (iv)(a) above exceeds the aggregate at (iv)(b) above, calculated by the Council in accordance with Section 31A(4) of the Act as its Council Tax requirement for the year. (Item R in the formula in Section 31B of the Act).

(d)	£1,693.39	being the amount at (iv)(c) above (Item R), all divided by Item T ((ii)(a) above), calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 31B of the Act, as the basic amount of its Council Tax for the year (including Parish precepts).
(e)	£452,066	being the aggregate amount of all special items (Parish precepts) referred to in Section 34(1) of the Act, each individual parish precept being: Blackrod £73,810 Horwich £225,402 Westhoughton £152,854
(f)	£1,687.65	being the amount at (iv)(d) above less the result given by dividing the amount at (iv)(e) above by Item T (ii)(a) above), calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 34(2) of the Act, as the basic amount of its Council Tax for the year for dwellings in those parts of its area to which no Parish precept relates.
(g)	Part of the Council's Area	Parish of Blackrod £1,724.82 Parish of Horwich £1,717.18 Parish of Westhoughton £1,705.02

being the amounts given by adding to the amount at (f) above the amounts of the special item or items relating to dwellings in those parts of the Council's area mentioned at (e) above divided in each case by the amount at (ii) above, calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 34(3) of the Act, as the basic amounts of its Council Tax for the year for dwellings in those parts of its area to which one or more special items relate.

(i) Part of the Council's Area

Valuation bands	Parish of Blackrod	Parish of Horwich	Parish of Westhoughton	All other parts of the Council's area
A	£1,149.87	£1,144.78	£1,136.67	£1,125.09
B	£1,341.54	£1,335.60	£1,326.14	£1,312.63
C	£1,533.16	£1,526.37	£1,515.56	£1,500.12
D	£1,724.82	£1,717.18	£1,705.02	£1,687.65
E	£2,108.10	£2,098.76	£2,083.90	£2,062.67
F	£2,491.42	£2,480.38	£2,462.82	£2,437.73
G	£2,874.69	£2,861.96	£2,841.69	£2,812.74
H	£3,449.64	£3,434.36	£3,410.04	£3,375.30

being the amounts given by multiplying the amounts at (f) and (g) above by the number which, in the proportion set out in Section 5(1) of the Act, is applicable to dwellings listed in a particular valuation band divided by the number which in that proportion is applicable to dwellings listed in valuation band D, calculated by the Council in accordance with Section 36(1) of the Act, as the amounts to be taken into account for the year in respect of categories of dwellings listed in different valuation bands

- (v) That it be noted that for the year 2023/24 the Mayoral Police and Crime Commissioner Precept and the Mayoral General Precept (including Fire Services) have stated the following amounts in precepts issued to the Council, in accordance with Section 40 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, for each of the categories of dwellings shown below:-

Precepting Authority

Valuation Bands	Mayoral General Precept (including Fire Services)	Mayoral Police and Crime Commissioner Precept
A	£71.96	£162.20
B	£83.96	£189.23
C	£95.95	£216.26
D	£107.95	£243.30
E	£131.93	£297.36
F	£155.92	£351.43
G	£179.91	£405.50
H	£215.90	£486.60

(vi) That, having calculated the aggregate in each case of the amounts at (iv), (f), (i), and (v), the Council, in accordance with Section 30(2) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, hereby sets the following amounts as the amounts of Council Tax for the year 2023/24 for each of the categories of dwellings shown below:-

(i) Part of the Council's Area

Valuation bands	Parish of Blackrod	Parish of Horwich	Parish of Westhoughton	All other parts of the Council's area
A	£1,384.03	£1,378.94	£1,370.83	£1,359.25
B	£1,614.73	£1,608.79	£1,599.33	£1,585.82
C	£1,845.37	£1,838.58	£1,827.77	£1,812.33
D	£2,076.07	£2,068.43	£2,056.27	£2,038.90
E	£2,537.39	£2,528.05	£2,513.19	£2,491.96
F	£2,998.77	£2,987.73	£2,970.17	£2,945.08
G	£3,460.10	£3,447.37	£3,427.10	£3,398.15
H	£4,152.14	£4,136.86	£4,112.54	£4,077.80

(vii) That the Council’s basic amount of Council Tax for 2023/24 at an increase of 3.99% is not excessive in accordance with principles approved under Section 52ZB Local Government Finance Act 1992.

(viii) That the Borough Treasurer be delegated authority to collect revenues and disburse monies from the relevant accounts.

(ix) That it be noted that the Government have set a National Non-Domestic Rate of 49.9p in the pound for small businesses and 51.2p in the pound for larger businesses for the financial year 2023/24.

(x) That the Council's current policy in respect of discretionary relief for charitable organisations, as approved by the Cabinet on the 6th February 2023, be reaffirmed and that the Borough Treasurer be delegated authority to determine applications for such relief.

(xi) That War Disablement Pensions and War Widows' Pensions be disregarded for the purposes of the Council Tax Support Scheme.

(xii) That Council approves the following definition for the ‘minimum occupancy period’ for Council Tax Discount Class C properties, to apply from 1st April 2023:

“For the purposes of Discount Class C, in considering whether a dwelling has been vacant for any period, any one period, not exceeding six weeks, during which it was not vacant shall be disregarded”.

(xiii) That the minutes of the proceedings of the undermentioned Scrutiny Committee regarding their consideration on the budget be noted:-

Corporate and External Issues Scrutiny Committee 9th February 2023

APPENDIX I

Strategic Equality Impact Assessment

1 Background and Context

1.1 This document provides a strategic EIA of the service reductions and changes that the council is proposing to deliver, in order to achieve a balanced budget in 2023/2024. It is a strategic analysis only at this stage, as the detail of each option is yet to be developed. This EIA has been updated to reflect the key issues raised during consultation; individual EIAs will be produced for each option, when developed, as part of an ongoing consultation exercise.

2 Budget Strategy

2.1 Over the last decade the council has successfully delivered a succession of budget reductions totalling around £220m.

2.2 It is proposed that the council will this time adopt a one-year budget strategy, albeit that this strategy will impact on 2024/2025, due to using reserves and grant funding to delay some of the savings required. The council cannot rely on reserves to enable the budget to be balanced in full, and it is important that work is started now to consider the impacts of the budget reductions through to 2024/2025.

2.3 The savings target of £4.3m is based on the following assumptions and considerations:

- 3.99% council tax increase in 2023/4 (2% ringfenced for Adult Social Care)
- A £0.9m contribution from the NHS
- Use of £10m reserves to balance the budget. This will mean that unachieved savings will be rolled forward into the 2024/25 budget cycle.

2.4 It is important to stress that in identifying options to achieve these cuts, the council needs to strike a balance between the impact on the general public of any council tax increase, and the impact on the public in terms of service reductions. A decision to reduce the council tax increase for 2023/4 would require a higher level of cuts – for every 1% of council tax that the council does not increase, we need to find another £1.3m of savings.

3 The Approach to Managing and Mitigating Service Impact

3.1 The further requirement for cuts in the context of eleven years' budget reductions and the restrictions on which parts of the council's budget these can be made from, coupled with high inflation rates and a challenging economic environment, mean that there are now even more limited options available across our services which enable the council to deliver a legal budget for 2023/4.

3.2 The council will take the following step to deliver the best options for Bolton from an extremely challenging set of choices, and to manage and mitigate the worst of the impacts arising as far as possible:

- Continue to maintain its strategy to ensure that statutory provision continues to be met, and to limit the impact on the most vulnerable in the borough as far as possible, whilst supporting our local economy.

4 Strategic Approach

4.1 Within the context of the council's strategic priorities, a series of principles have been articulated to inform the proposals. These are:

- Further digitalisation of council services to realise efficiencies in conjunction with the council's Digital Inclusion Strategy;
- Streamlining processes and driving out inefficiencies to maximise the resources available to the council and its partners;
- Alternative service delivery models to deliver reductions in operating costs;
- Maximising opportunities to generate income, e.g. by supporting more businesses to invest in Bolton.

5 Specific Proposals

5.1 There are a number of specific options with a potential equality impact, including several which impact on the size of the council's workforce (overall it is estimated that at least 21 Full Time Equivalent [FTE] roles could be displaced, but for a number of options the figure is impossible to quantify until further analysis and options development has been carried out); reviews of universal and targeted services; and changes to charges and subsidies, and potentially some eligibility criteria. Details are provided at **Appendix C**.

6 Consultation

6.1 Formal consultation on the budget options set out in the report took place between 12th December 2022 and 9th January 2023, and included:

- Formal consultation with trades unions – information and proposals set out in this report were presented to the joint unions on 2nd December 2022;
- Views and comments sought from all stakeholders via an online consultation questionnaire. A paper copy was available upon request.
- Targeted communications with representatives of the community and voluntary sector and business rates payers, including via Bolton Vision Partners, Bolton's Voluntary Sector Forum, and Greater Manchester Chamber of Commerce.
- A staff briefing, which took place online and was available to staff using council and personal devices, recorded for staff to view at a time convenient to them. This was supported by regular communications and updates via email (Staff News) explaining the overall budget position and providing a link to the report online. Staff were encouraged to give their views by completing the consultation questionnaire; many staff are also Bolton residents.
- Briefings for teams and individuals as needed, where they were identified within the savings options.

6.2 Specific proposals, which will be brought forward during the course of the new programme, will be subject to individual EIAs, consultation and assessment procedures at the appropriate time, if required.

7 Equality Impact Assessment Questions

a Describe in summary the aims, objectives and purpose of the proposals, including desired outcome

7.1 The report sets out the strategic context and outline budget for 2023/2024, including options to achieve the anticipated reduction of £4.3m over the single-year budget cycle. The report also sets out the requirement to find further savings in 2024/2025.

b Who are the main stakeholders in relation to the proposals?

7.2 As set out in previous strategic EIAs, the very nature of the services the council provides, and the level of savings required, mean that a range of stakeholders are likely to be affected by reductions in and changes to council service provision in some way over the next year. In particular:

- Service users and/or their carers – both now and in the future, may find that some aspects of service provision change. Some services may change fundamentally and be delivered in very different ways, some services may reduce or stop, and some service users' eligibility to access services may change;
- Members of the general public – could be affected by further reductions in universal services and changes in council tax, and service redesign;
- Organisations working with, or supported by, the council – the reducing level of resources available will continue to have an effect on the extent to which the council can provide financial support for the work of partner organisations. Equally, whilst difficult to quantify, the reduction in services provided by the council may also have an effect on the demands for the services provided by these partners.
- Staff – given the ongoing scale of the savings required as a proportion of overall council budgets, there will continue to be an impact on staff, whether through loss of employment or associated restructuring and change. The council's workforce has already reduced by around 1,900 jobs since 2009, and a minimum of 21 FTEs may be impacted by this programme. However, the council retains its objective of seeking to manage all reductions consensually as far as possible, to mitigate the impact on staff, through the use of voluntary early retirement and voluntary redundancy in line with statutory requirements and business need, as well as vacancy management.

c In summary, what are the anticipated (positive or negative) impacts of the proposals?

7.3 The approach set out by the council to deliver its budget continues to prioritise protecting the most vulnerable and enabling economic growth. The approach set out earlier in this EIA seeks to deliver the best outcomes for Bolton in very difficult circumstances and, where possible, mitigate the worst of the impacts, particularly for the borough's most vulnerable people.

7.4 As previously, the council aims to minimise the impact of budget cuts on front-line service provision. Proposals have again been sought from each of the council's directorates to offer a degree of protection to front-line services, and to safeguard the borough's most vulnerable people, whilst at the same time moving forward on our

economic strategy. However, the level of cuts cumulatively faced over successive years means that it is inevitable that even front-line services will see an impact.

7.5 The potentially negative impacts are: reduction or cessation of universal and non-statutory services; elevated thresholds and reduced levels of statutory service provision; an increase in council tax; increased fees and charges for council services; changes to eligibility; and a potential further reduction of at least 21 Full Time Equivalents (FTE). The council will continue to mitigate this through: careful targeting to protect the most disadvantaged in the borough, ongoing investment in economic growth and development; and a workforce strategy to mitigate the impact of reductions in staff as far as possible.

Council Tax

7.6 The Secretary of State has announced that the core threshold for council tax will increase to 2.99% for 2023/24 until 2027/8, without the need for a referendum, with a further 2% being levied for Adult Social Care in 2023/4.

7.7 The council acknowledges that any increase in council tax has a financial effect on those who are eligible to pay in the borough, and may be particularly difficult for those who are already under financial pressure. However, the proposed increases will subsequently reduce the level of cuts which may otherwise need to be achieved. In addition, the council continues to provide a discretionary council tax discount scheme for eligible residents requiring extra help, as well as a Local Welfare Provision scheme for vulnerable people in short term crisis. Additional support is also currently available linked to the Cost of Living crisis, in the form of the Household Support Fund.

7.8 The council is increasingly reliant on council tax, which now forms 50% of the overall income stream from general taxation. The majority of responses (68%) to the consultation indicated disagreement with the proposed level of increase to council tax (1.99%, plus 2% for Adult Social Care), reflecting general concerns around financial challenges and the cost of living. Of those who provided more detail (112 respondents), 63 indicated a preference for an increase in council tax of 2% in total. Comments received during consultation range from those who felt that cuts to services during the Cost of Living crisis mean that these services were needed even more, to those who felt they were getting less services for more money, to those who said they were already struggling to eat and buy essentials, and who would be unable to afford any increases without cutting back on other expenditure areas such as heating. One person said that they felt that adult social care funding should rise, but not at the expense of children's services.

7.9 The 2% increase proposed specifically for Adult Social Care would help to protect the most vulnerable service users and residents in the borough and reduce the cuts in services they receive.

d **Is there any potential for (positive or negative) differential impact or adverse impact with regards to the identified stakeholders and the diversity groups (race, religion, disability, gender, gender reassignment, age, sexuality, caring status, pregnancy and maternity, marriage and civil partnership, socio-economic)? Can this be justified/what mitigating actions will be taken?**

8 Council Stakeholders

Service Users (including parents and carers)

8.1 The council is committed to continuing to protect children's social care services as far as possible, however, reviews are proposed in services for children and young people (CYP). Limiting the impact on the most vulnerable CYP is a priority, and care has been taken to ensure that the potential impacts of the proposals are mitigated as far as possible through targeting and engaging partners to deliver diminished council services.

8.2 The council is also committed to protecting adult and older people's social care services as far as possible, and in addition to this budget strategy, there continues to be investment from the Greater Manchester devolution programme to assist in integration of health and social care services, which will mitigate against some of these reductions and improve outcomes for adults and older people.

Members of the general public

8.3 The council has a clear strategy of moving from universal to targeted services, in order to offer a degree of protection for services for the borough's most vulnerable people, whilst at the same time moving forward with our economic strategy. The strategy continues to be pursued through these proposals.

8.4 If the proposed council tax increases are approved, there would be a further, specific financial impact on those who pay council tax in Bolton, as they would be asked to pay an increased level of council tax. By raising council tax, however, the council is able to increase its income and therefore reduce the level of cuts that may otherwise need to be achieved, including specifically via the adult social care precept of 2%.

8.5 In coming to a decision about possible council tax increases, the council will seek to strike a balance between the impact on the general public of a council tax increase, and the impact on them in terms of service reductions.

Organisations working with or supported by the council

8.6 As in previous years, the council must look at making reductions from across the range of services which it provides, including commissioned and grant funded services. This means that partners who receive funding from the council may see a change or reduction in their funding, which may, in turn, have an effect on their service delivery.

8.7 Clearly, it will be essential to ensure that the council continues its good working relationships with partners from across the private, voluntary, and charitable sectors to understand, and where possible, manage the impact of possible funding changes. In addition, it will be necessary for individual reviews to consider any potential impact on partner service delivery, e.g. where complementary services are being reviewed. The council has carried out significant work with these partners over the last few years to encourage and assist them to become self-financing and sustainable where possible.

8.8 Consultation feedback indicated concerns about reductions in staff at the council, as well as the effect that reductions in council services would have on "The Bolton Family".

Staff

8.9 Given the ongoing scale of the budget requirements, there will continue to be an impact on staff, whether through loss of employment or associated restructuring and change. Since 2009 the council's workforce has already reduced by around 1,900 employees, almost entirely through voluntary means, for example, by deleting vacancies, offering voluntary early retirement/redundancy, and a comprehensive redeployment scheme. The proposals set out in the report have been developed, alongside a continuing commitment to asset of values as an employer, which seek to protect the council's workforce from the worst aspects of the budget reductions and remain a best practice employer. The proposal as a basis for consultation is that the council will consider reductions as far as possible via consensual means.

8.10 Consultation feedback indicated concerns about the impact of cuts on staff workloads and on women in lower paid roles, as well as the impact on staff mental health and wellbeing due to the ongoing threat of job reductions.

Diversity Groups

8.11 Throughout the process, the council will need to consider the impact of its proposals on its duties under national equalities legislation, which require it to have due regard to the outcomes below, whilst also ensuring that the council can set a legal, balanced budget.

1. Eliminating unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by the Act;

2. Advancing equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it;

3. Fostering good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it.

8.12 Analysis of those defined groups with protected characteristics is as follows:

- Race
- Religion
- Disability
- Gender
- Gender reassignment
- Age
- Sexuality
- Caring status
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Marriage and civil partnership

8.13 Headline analysis identifies potential impacts around age, disability, caring status and socio-economic deprivation. Specific impact around race, religion, gender, gender reassignment, sexuality, pregnancy and maternity, and marriage and civil partnership has not been identified at this early stage, but will be analysed as part of detailed EIAs for individual reviews.

8.14 Further detail included in previous strategic reports indicates that equality issues must be examined around customer access, as the council continues to move towards a greater use of technology as the primary access route. This is supported through the council's digital inclusion strategy for our communities.

Children and Young People and their Parents/Carers

8.15 Several significant reviews are proposed for services for children and young people. In the broadest sense, changes to such services have the potential to impact upon children and young people, including those who are disabled or have special educational needs; their parents/carers; and those young people who are also parents or carers. Limiting the impact on the most vulnerable children and young people will continue to be a priority, and care will be taken to ensure that the potential impacts of proposals are well understood and mitigated as far as possible, e.g. through targeting.

8.16 The consultation undertaken at this high level has highlighted the concerns about the impact that changes to both universal and targeted service provision could have on children and young people, in particular on their mental health and on children with special educational needs and/or who are disabled. Respondents were also worried about children's opportunities being restricted, impacts on their health due to schools not being able to afford heating or parent/s carers not being able to afford food, as well as the impact of successive rounds of cuts to particular services.

Older People and those who care for Older People

8.17 Ongoing transformation within adult social care means that the way in which services are provided will continue to change. The council continues to seek to deliver quality and affordable services, whilst also promoting independence, choice and control, and meeting statutory duties. However, service users and their families and/or carers will see changes as a result of the budget proposals, and also as the programme of integration across health and social care services continues.

8.18 The consultation at this high level has highlighted some potential impacts on older people and their carers. Many cited the impact that reductions would have on older adults, and many were worried about the impact of increased council tax on those with fixed incomes.

8.19 Comments were also received regarding the impact on people's health, and worries about having enough to eat and/or ability to have the heating on, and reductions in or increases to charges for services which help people to stay healthy.

Disability

8.20 A number of options in the budget proposals have the potential to impact on disabled people and those who care for them in Bolton. Care will be taken to ensure that the potential impacts of the proposals are well understood and mitigated as far as possible, e.g. through early engagement with service users.

8.21 The consultation has highlighted concerns across both disabled adults and children and young people and their carers about proposed increases to council tax or other charges, whilst their incomes haven't increased in line with inflation.

8.22 Comments were also received about the impact of the budget proposals on carers.

8.23 As each of the final options is brought forward the council will need to give full consideration to the potential impacts on disabled people and ensure that services continue to be accessible and appropriate.

Socio-economic Deprivation

8.24 The council continues to aim to protect the most vulnerable in the borough and to target resources to them, although resources are much more limited than they have been previously. This budget strategy does have the potential to have an impact on those people who are experiencing socio-economic deprivation. This will need to be considered as part of each review in the detailed EIA.

8.25 Many comments received during the consultation highlighted the impact that reductions and changes to services could have on those experiencing socio-economic deprivation. There were also many comments on the effect of increases in council tax charges. Overall, almost half of respondents talked about already struggling with the cost of living before any proposed changes and being plunged further into poverty.

e **Are there any gaps in your evidence, or conclusions which make it difficult to quantify the potential adverse impact? If so, please explain how you will explore the proposal in greater depth.**

8.26 Yes, this strategic EIA provides a high level response to the council's standard EIA questions. It will, however, be necessary to bring forward detailed proposals for each of the options, including detailed analysis of equality impact, and this will take place on a phased basis over the next 12 months. It will also be necessary to consult with trades unions and appropriate stakeholders on each of the individual reviews as they come forward. The consultation processes will help to inform a full assessment of equality impact.

8.27 In conclusion, the council continues to make every effort to protect the most vulnerable as far as possible, support economic development, and to respond appropriately to its duties under the Quality Act. However, this strategic EIA recognise the significant challenge presented by the financial position for Bolton, and the likelihood that many of the strategic budget options, whilst seeking to deliver the "least worst" outcome for Bolton, may well have an impact on a arrange of stakeholders as the council sets a legal budget for the coming year.

This EIA form and report has been checked and countersigned by the Directorate Equalities Officer before proceeding to Executive Cabinet Member(s)

Please confirm the outcome of this EIA:

No major impact identified, therefore no major changes required – proceed	
Adjustments to remove barriers / promote equality (mitigate impact) have been identified – proceed	x
Positive impact for one or more groups justified on the grounds of promoting equality - proceed	
Continue despite having identified potential for adverse impact/missed opportunities for promoting equality – this requires a strong justification	
The EIA identifies actual or potential unlawful discrimination - stop and rethink	

Report Officer
Name: Nicky Connell
Date: 24.01.2023
Directorate Equalities Lead Officer
Name: Rebecca Albrow
Date: 25.01.2023

APPENDIX J

Budget Proposals 2023/24 Consultation Responses

1. Background

In December 2022, Bolton Council's Cabinet approved proposals for the 2023/24 budget for consultation with residents, businesses, staff, partner organisations and other stakeholders. The proposals reflected the continuing financial challenges faced by the organisation, resulting in a £15 million budget gap.

The proposals outlined that the organisation has tried to protect the most vulnerable people within the borough and that the government has indicated there will be an increase in funding for social care. However, despite this, on-going savings still need to be made because of a number of challenges. These include expected reductions in other forms of funding from central Government, rising demand for council services, increases in inflation, a staff pay award and rising energy costs.

Whilst these may be partly balanced by a proposed increase in Council Tax, the introduction of increased Government funding for social care and better than expected income from Business Rates and Council Tax, the council still needs to make savings of £15 million. These savings are proposed in several ways:

£4.3 million from savings across the council in 2023-4.
£0.9m one-off contribution from the NHS
£10m from reserves.

As part of the review process residents and stakeholders were asked to reflect on the proposals to make £4.3 million of savings for the year 2023-2024, via a public consultation. Views from all stakeholders would be considered alongside other information to help the council decide on the final budget options in February 2023. However, once detailed options have been drawn up, residents and stakeholders could be expected to engage in further consultations.

2. Methodology

Between 12th December 2022 and 9th January 2023, the council ran a public consultation, seeking to engage residents and stakeholders impacted by future funding cuts in sharing their reflections on a proposed reduction in council budgets of £4.3 million.

During that period a comprehensive communication plan was implemented to raise awareness of the proposed budget cuts and areas that would see cuts to services as a result. Information was distributed to all stakeholders, including the Vision Partnership, elected members, trades unions, businesses, community groups, as well as residents across the borough. A press release was distributed to local print media and a marketing screen was utilised to share key messages about the consultation in a prominent town centre shopping area. The consultation was also shared via E-View, a council consultation database made up of over 600 residents. Documentation was made accessible on the council's consultation webpage and social media was heavily utilised throughout the period to share key messages about the consultation.

Information was also distributed to all borough libraries.

Participants were surveyed using a questionnaire tool made up of open and closed questions, providing respondents the opportunity to reflect and share their thoughts on the proposal. The questionnaire was made available both digitally and offline, with the survey being accessible on the council's consultation web page, as well as in hard copy format on request.

*A copy of the questionnaire is included at the end of this document, located in Appendix A

Analysis notes

- Results are presented in the questionnaire format with 'Don't know' type responses removed unless stated.
- Comments have been categorised where feasible. Unless otherwise stated, only categories with 10 or more responses are shown. Categories may overlap and a comment from one respondent included in multiple categories. A sample of comments [verbatim] are included in the report. Comments may be abbreviated so that only the relevant extract is included. One comment may be coded into multiple categories, and each category may only cover a certain aspect of the comment, for example a respondent may have made both positive and negative comments about the same aspect.
- Base: unless otherwise stated the base is the number of respondents to a particular question.
- Data has been cleansed where appropriate, e.g. comments moved into existing responses.

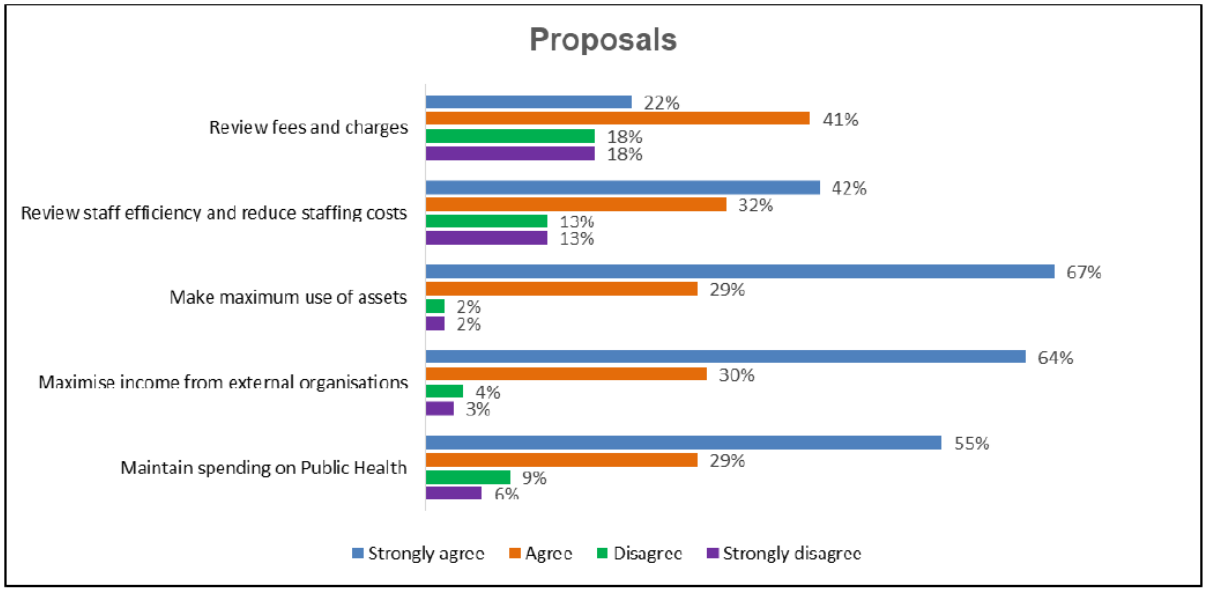
3. Digital and paper-based survey responses

A total of 634 residents and stakeholders took part in the digital survey, outlining their reflections on the proposals to reduce Bolton Council's overall budget by £4.3 million. The information outlined below reflects how they responded to the questions asked.

4. Proposals

Residents and stakeholders were asked to review the proposal to make £4.3 million of savings under five key themes. 606 residents responded to the question, with 96% agreeing with the proposal to make better use of assets. 94% of stakeholders agreed that the council should maximise income from external organisations. 84% agreed with the principle of maintaining spending on Public Health. Three-quarters (75%) agreed that a review was needed to explore staff efficiencies and reduce staff costs. 63% agreed with the proposal to review fees and charges.

A breakdown for each proposal is shown in the chart below.



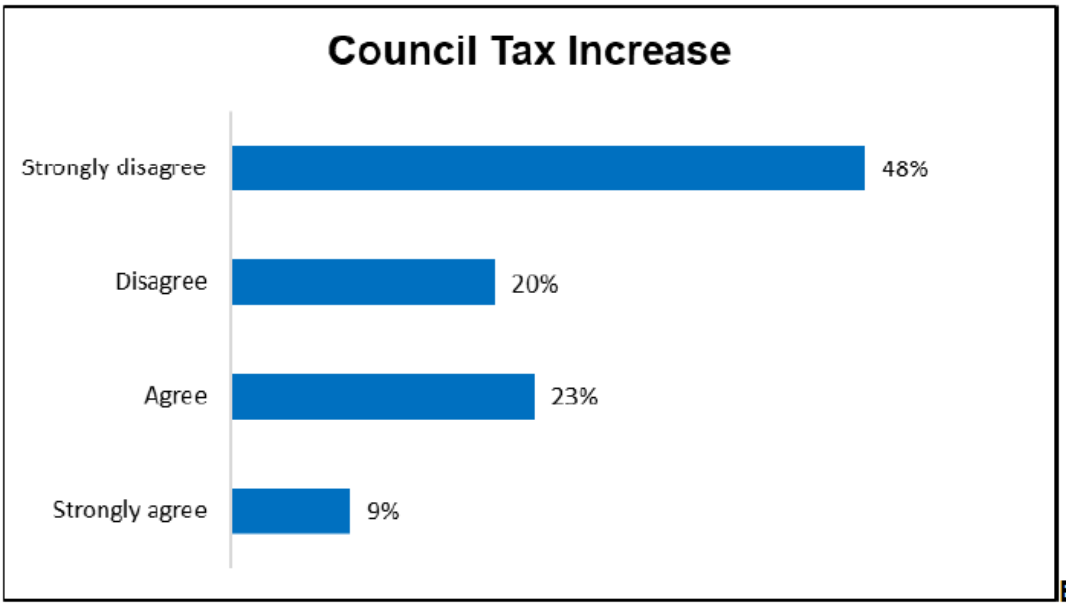
Base average: 606

5. Proposal to increase Council Tax

Respondents taking part in the survey were asked whether or not they supported the proposal to increase

Council Tax by 3.99%; proposing a 1.99% increase in the General Levy, plus a 2% rise for Adult Social Care. Of the 619 responses to this question, 68% were opposed to the increase and 32% of respondents agreed with the increase.

Of the 413 respondents who disagreed with the percentage increase and went on to provide further detail, 65% wanted no further increases in the current Council Tax rates. 34% stated that there should be a rise of less than 3.99%; and 1% of respondents thought rates should rise above the proposed 3.99%.



Base: 619

Q3a. How much do you think Council Tax should rise by?

127 comments were received by stakeholders, which are broken down into 14 rate rises, rising by 1% to 5%.

Budget 2023 Q3a Preferred rise	Number of respondents
1%	13
1.20%	1
1.50%	6
1.95%	1
1.99%	5
1.99% overall	2
2%	63
2.30%	1
2.40%	1
2.50%	7
2.99%	1
3%	9
4%	1
5%	1
Base	*112*

- Note: where a range was given the highest percentage was used
- The most popular rise was 2% [63 respondents].

Comments (made by one respondent per comment unless otherwise stated)

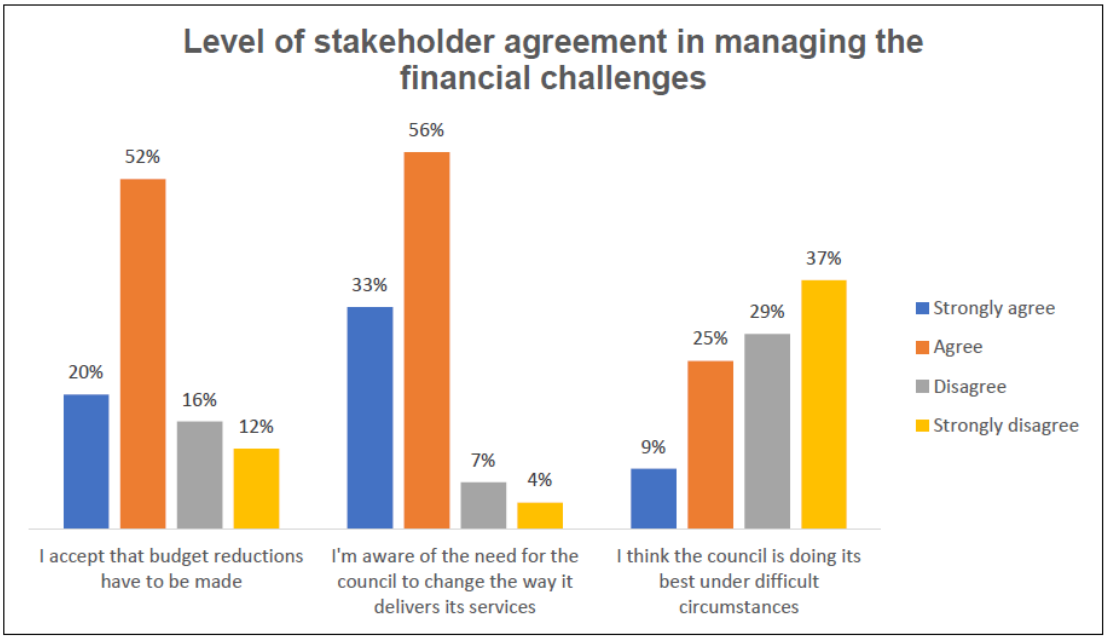
- Staff efficiency savings should be made [3 respondents],
- Concerns about the cost of living [2 respondents] *"those in middle Band homes - say £300k homes - are the ones being stretched"*
- The Mayor should not be paid for thorough Council Tax [1 respondent]
- Cuts should be made by NHS / Public Health [1 respondent]

Additional comments were made by respondents who had not suggested a figure.

- Four respondents were concerned about the other aspects of tax collected by Bolton Council, such as fire, policing, parish levies or funding for the mayor
- One respondent felt that they could not comment before an efficiency review had been carried out.
- One suggested council tax should rise *"minimally",* another that the increase should be the *"same as last year"* though a third said *"anything less than inflation is a real cut in services at a time demand is increasing".*
- Another respondent felt that while adult social care funding should rise this should not be at the expense of children's services.
- There was also one request to move from a tax based on property values to an income-based tax

6. Managing change

As part of the consultation process, respondents were asked to reflect upon the rationale for changing service delivery, whether reductions were necessary and whether the local authority was 'doing its best' under difficult circumstances. Of the 601 stakeholders answering this question, 72% of respondents agreed that budget reductions have to be made. 89% were aware of the need for the council to change the way it delivers its services. 34% believe the council is doing its best under difficult circumstances.



Base average: 601

7. Impact

Residents and stakeholders were asked to reflect on the overall impact the reduction of £4.3 million to services would have on them.

404 respondents chose to make comment, which were then themed into 10 key areas. These are outlined in the table below.

Code	Description of impact	Number of respondents
a)	Financial	298
b)	Reduced services / poor value for money	115
c)	Impact on people who work / don't claim benefits	87
d)	Impact on health	45
e)	Borough will be more run down	35
f)	Impact on young	28
g)	Impact on older people	19
h)	Impact on people with disabilities	15
i)	Impact on long-term costs to council / Government	15
j)	Impact on single people / single parents	10

7a. Financial

298 respondents reflected upon increased costs, including the financial pressures they would face if Council Tax was to rise.

- *Already struggling with sky high bills and an increase in Council Tax will just flip us over the edge.*
- *Budgets are already stretched to breaking point for the majority including my own, adding in a further cost will actually break many households and plunge them into further poverty.*
- *Given it in one hand from Central Government and then it's taken away in the other with Council Tax.*
- *People can not afford to live now never mind after a council tax increase.*
- *Any further increases will put us under further pressure and this is before the next increase in gas and electricity which is due.*
- *Can not afford council tax increase on top of other services so are likely to not pay.*
- *Increasing Council Tax during a cost of living crisis is malevolent.*
- *Out of an income if £800 a month I have to find £1500 with high energy bills. It's just not feasible*

7b. Reduced services / poor value for money

115 respondents expressed concern about reductions in services provided by the council, with many feeling that provision was already quite low.

- *Proposed cuts to staffing levels in Social Care is dangerous, staff are already doing a lot with very little resource and cannot manage this.*
- *See less being done (street cleaning etc) but pay more for it.*
- *Cut to services when the cost of living crisis means we have a greater need of these services.*
- *[No] access services they need. Have no faith in motto looking after the Bolton family.*
- *Overcharged for the very poor services delivered by Bolton Council.*
- *Our community/area has been largely forgotten by the council over the past 10 years, so this will make it even worse.*
- *Don't understand why I would have to pay an increase when my town council have had to repeatedly meet on a bench outside the town hall and your selling off a lot of community buildings in westhoughton including trying to repurpose the town hall with things we don't need.*

7c. Impact on people who work / don't claim benefits

87 respondents felt that people who worked or didn't claim benefits would be affected in a number of ways. There was a feeling that whilst those on benefits were being protected, wages were not keeping pace with inflation. There were also concerns about job security and increased demands from those who work for Bolton Council

- *Employees already stretched to capacity - trying to do the same things with much less resource. Council needs to think about how to educate managers and leaders better to cope with the changes proposed.*
- *Its now the middle income who are really feeling the squeeze. every month I am left in arrears and this winter I am even struggling to the point where i can't go out and buy myself a winter coat.*
- *Planning Department … already understaffed and yet the assistant director keeps promising an improved service even so far as to act outside government guidance and against legal advice.*
- *Bolton Council staff will be required to take on a bigger workload or work under more pressure without an increase in salary and under the constant threat of losing job security.*
- *Will hit those people who fall just below the threshold of being able to claim help with paying such bills.*
- *I work full time plus do extra hours 54 hour per week, my husband too full time, increases to rents and council tax will push us further under.*

7d. Impact on health

45 respondents were worried about not having enough food to eat and being unable to afford heating. They were also worried about job security, about family members and the effect reduced services would have on people living a healthy lifestyle.

- *Uncertainty / anxiety about job security*
- *Face losing my job. This has now been the case for ten years it is not good for your staff's mental health to constantly under threat, sickness levels are high, and this is part of the cause.*
- *Continued deterioration in parks and footpaths and pavements, deterring active travel*
- *We will starve*
- *Heat or eat would be my problem*
- *Worry about future, can't plan for the future, worry about older relations.*
- *Leisure and sports provision which also impact on health and the NHS.*

7e. Borough will be more run down

35 respondents felt that proposed budget cuts would lead to a deterioration in the borough environment.

- *The town is going downhill and these cuts will make it a worse place to live and poorer place.*
- *We will have to live in a bigger mess than we do now.*
- *Living standards around the town are poor and falling. The condition of the roads is appalling.*
- *Bolton is falling apart and needs investment.*
- *General decline of the areas we live in, with road repairs being delayed or bodged, litter and waste building up, relying on volunteer groups for litter picking.*

7f. Impact on young

28 people raised young people and the services provided to them as an area of concern.

- *Please leave the youth service alone - they have been hit so badly in recent years, our young people need their service and should be seen as a priority, not an easy target.*
- *Children will have less opportunities.*
- *I work in a school in Bolton. We can't turn the central heating on for more than a few hours a day as it is.*
- *Any further lack of investment will see Bolton continue to languish at the bottom of league tables for permanent excisions, outcomes for SEND learners etc*
- *Review the support given to younger people would help as currently not fit for purpose with NHS wait lists for counselling etc being so long.*
- *Struggle to put food on the table especially for my little girl.*

7g. Impact on older people

19 comments were received outlining the impact on older people, specifically focusing on how they may struggle financially and the financial cuts to services they rely upon.

- *As older people I dint think there are enough services.*
- *My husband and I are pensioners, who use BMBC services. Any Council Tax rise hits us unfairly because we pay the same amount of Council Tax as our neighbours who are in work.*
- *As pensioner we pay excessive council tax with no help.*
- *As a pensioner with a fixed income, an increase of 4% in council tax will significantly affect my ability to maintain my current lifestyle when utility, food and other cost increases are taken into account.*
- *Will have to tighten our belts I am a pensioner my wife is state pension eligible 2023.*

7h. Impact on people with disabilities

15 comments reflected on the impact to residents with disabilities. Those with disabilities were vulnerable to any additional increases in their personal budget and could be impacted by any reduction to service provision.

- *If there's a increase in council tax I will be even worse off as a single disabled person.*
- *I'm a single mother who's disabled having to claim PIP. … struggling severely to the point my four year old daughter is stealing food from school because she's worried about her mum not eating!*
- *Increase in council tax will impact disposable income also due to disability fees and charging of services has the biggest impact no means tested benefits.*

7i. Impact on long-term costs to council / Government

15 residents reflected upon the long-term impact of budget cuts. Reduced services and increases in financial demands could result in more people seeking help.

- *Will only force families further into poverty or those on the edge into poverty which will cost the council more in the long term*
- *Will push towards needing more help from local government*
- *Will push more of the Bolton Family into poverty and increase demand on already overstretched services.*

7j. Impact on single people / single parents

10 residents outlined the impact to single people and single parent families, stating that any further cuts would cause these groups to struggle financially.

- *I am a single person on a low income who would struggle with any increase in council tax as I cannot claim any benefits.*
- *I am a single parent, working as a Teaching assistant and currently I do not have any money available to provide myself with food.*

Other comments

Respondents also expressed views about parish and other levies; the impact on carers; the cumulative impact on voluntary and housing sectors who may be expected to pick up the workload. Other comments reflected on residents who may have to move to a lower rated accommodation or become homeless as a result of additional financial pressures. In addition, some comments suggested there would be less money available to spend on local businesses; and 'vulnerable' people may be affected by the proposal.

8. Alternative Solutions

The consultation process encouraged respondents to put forward alternative suggestions to reducing the budget by £4.3 million. 385 responses were received, with suggestions categorised into 13 themes.

Code	Category	Number of comments
a)	Revise staff costs / improve efficiency	149
b)	Increase revenue / use reserves	71
c)	Pro-active spending	59
d)	Reduce services	57
e)	Curtail projects / events	57
f)	Utlise private / voluntary sector	53
g)	Review number / expense of councillors	48
h)	Sell or rent buildings / assets	44
i)	Attract businesses / people	35
j)	Environmental improvements	26
k)	Stop mayoral funding / leave GM	22
l)	Improve ICT / reduce correspondence	14
m)	Lobby central Government	13

8a. Revise staff costs / improve efficiency

The majority of alternative proposals (149 comments) were around cutting overall staffing costs and improving the efficiency of the workforce.

- *Spending more on salaries would stabilise the workforce and hugely reduce our overspend on agency workers and save us money. Our exit interviews tell us that pay is the number one reason for leaving Bolton.* [Re Social Workers]
- *All Principal officers, including the Chief executive could take a pay cut. The average Joe would dream of being on a Principal Officer's salary.*
- *Cut middle management there's too many cooks constantly changing the goalposts. More front line staff gets more work done.*
- *Review management structures and cut higher salary positions before removing value added roles.*
- *Stop employing workers who are based abroad in professional jobs.*
- *If you're reviewing the number of staff you have then investigate if you need so many senior people on high wages.*
- *Make everyone return to the office.*
- *Cut the big wigs pay and put back into front line services.*
- *Offer redundancy to everyone.*

8b. Increase revenue / use reserves

In order to maintain current levels of service and avoid large increase in Council Tax, 71 respondents suggested ways to increase revenue or felt that further reserves should be utilised. Non-payments could be pursued; more people could pay a portion of their Council Tax bill; and services charges could be increased or introduced.

- *Increase bin charges to 25£ per bin.*
- *In my 50 years of business experience "Reserves" traditionally are held for a rainy day; currently we would consider "it is not raining at the moment but pissing down".*
- *More needs to be done to ensure everyone pays their council tax. How much has been written off in previous years?*
- *Consider standard, one off charge for provision of disability equipment, people paying for installation of Keysafes.*
- *Council tax should be increased to 25% of council tax for those who get council tax support.*
- *Charge people on benefits a nominal council tax fee. If they paid £10 a month, I'm sure this would go a long way to raising the shortfall.*
- *Most of the office-based staff are still WFH could the buildings be rented out?*
- *The council should offer better parking options and collect revenue from this.*
- *Charge a small amount for the rubbish tip, we use regularly and would pay a small amount to use.*

8c. Pro-active spending

By spending wisely and providing services at a high standard, futher expense could be avoided down the line. These were the reflections of 59 stakeholders.

- *Increase the salary scales to retain/recruit staff and avoid using expensive agency workers.*
- *Invest in assets to sell advertising on eg large screens, billboards, vehicles.*
- *Repair roads and paths with decent materials, to ensure they last.*
- *More spend and investment in our community services with an preventative/ strength base ethos, building better/ stronger community resources that keep families and people healthier and living better for longer.*
- *Placing skips and recycling at end of streets so not need to go house to house and accepting mattresses and white goods and fencing etc so less flytipping.*
- *Avoid cuts in essentials such as bin collections as in the long term this will cost you more due to fly tipping etc*
- *Maintain roads to prevent unnecessary claims made to the council.*

8d. Reduce services

57 respondents felt that the council should concentrate on providing essential / statutory services only.

- *It's time the council focused on what it legally has to do and stop some of the nice, but none essential services.*
- *Only deliver compulsory services.*
- *Stop or reduce all non statutory services to avoid rise in tax.*
- *Bin collections to reduce to three weekly whilst under these harsh circumstances.*
- *Closing Library's,*
- *Just do the basics of what's expected and no more. We can't afford it.*
- *The clinics for vaccinations seem to use up a lot of time, sometimes very few people turn up.*

8e. Curtail projects / events

57 respondents stated that the council could save money by reducing spend on events and projects [especially cycle lanes] that were not of universal benefit.

- *Get rid of surplus christmas lights. 1 tree is enough, and what's with the giant snowflakes being projected over the town buildings? Also, stop making cycle lanes, we can battle it out with the cars (speaking as a cyclist).*
- *Money is wasted on unimportant things, like flowers signage, events and meetings for a minority rather that the whole town.*
- *Stop food festival.*
- *Stop spending on cycle lanes that are hardly used.*
- *I ve lost count how much we ve wasted on the town centre. It's dead you need to accept that.*

8f. Utilise private / voluntary sector

Money could be saved by working with partner organisations, private and voluntary sectors who, it was suggested, could run services currently offered by the council.

- *More partnership working with private organisations to provide frontline services. For example, Street Cleaning, Street Lighting repairs, Bin emptying.*
- *I wonder whether looking to divest services to other partners and co-location has been fully explored, particularly around the Place agenda.*
- *Enhancing the use of volunteers from the local community… There is an untapped source of knowledge, skills and resources that the council fail to use which can support delivering services.*
- *Combine register offices with say Bury & Salford.*
- *Consider delivery of non statutory services with the VCSE sector where possible to help enable the continued delivery of statutory services.*
- *Use people on benefit to carry out community service.*

8g. Review number / expense of councillors

Saving could be made by cutting the number of councillors per ward, or by reducing their allowances.

- *Cut councillors by half simple save fortune.*
- *Start by reducing the number of elected members, we don't need 60 councillors chatting about things they have no control over.*
- *Spend less on meals for councillor, no expense unless really needed.*
- *Cut councillors payments*
- *Cut councillors expenses, get rid of freebies for councillors.*

8h. Sell or rent buildings / assets

Buildings that were under-utilised could be sold. Others could be rented out or given over for use by the local community or voluntary sector.

- *Sell off Wellspring and Paderborn and use the empty space in Town Hall.*
- *I'm sure many services can be run as effectively via home working and the amount of office space can therefore be reduced, with savings made accordingly.*
- *Look at ways to generate income for unused properties.*
- *Reduce council owned buildings - have staff work from home 2 days a week*
- *Better use of buildings,*

8i. Attract businesses / people

Respondents felt that more could be done to attract business and visitors [including residents] to use all areas of the borough. Bolton town centre could attract more shoppers etc if free / reduced parking was offered.

- *Reduce business rates on unused properties for the first 12-24 months of lease to increase interest in developing a business within Bolton town centre and reduce the number of abandoned buildings.*
- *Its cheaper for me to travel to the Trafford centre with free parking without having to worry about rushing. Free parking will attract more customers and bring in more businesses.*
- *Bring Bolton town centre alive and encourage people to come and spend instead of driving them away.*
- *It's about growing social economy and bringing people from other towns into bolton. It's about having facilities for children within the town centre. Bolton residents go out of Bolton to enjoy evenings of meals out.*

Other alternatives

8j. Environmental improvements

These included reducing utility spend and leaving space for nature.

- *Instead of heating and maintaining large virtually empty public buildings just accept that WFH has worked re: effectiveness and can be a more efficient way of working.*
- *An emergency audit of heating/ lighting of all council buildings to reduce waste/ tackle fuel inefficiency. Simple measures (insulation, looking at optimum temperature levels) could save money.*
- *Stop mowing verges. There is no need. Stop mowing roundabouts, again there is no need. During climate emergency and biodiversity crisis , both these areas would benefit from 1 cut a year , that would save a lot of money and look better as well.*

8k. Stop mayoral funding / leave GM

Respondents did not value the mayoral posts for Bolton / Greater Manchester, and some felt that Bolton Council should leave Greater Manchester.

- *Cut back on your mayor the car and his meals.*
- *Could the number of Elected Members be reduced to two per ward and the Mayor's office temporarily closed until the picture looks a little better.*
- *Get rid of the GM Mayor.*
- *BMBC could vote to leave the Greater Manchester Authority/Council thereby saving the GM and Major's levies which have done nothing for BMBC.*

8l. Improve ICT / reduce correspondence

Better use of modern ICT and greater digitisation could save costs, especially if communications were sent electronically rather than as hard copies.

- *I.T. Systems should be used to their full potential freeing up time for staff.*
- *Cutting down on publications sent in the post as not everyone needs or wants them.*
- *Although many tools have been introduced especially with Office 365, not enough training on how to make best use of them has been provided.*

8m. Lobby central Government

Respondents in this category felt that Bolton Council should ask central Government for more funding and refuse to accept cuts.

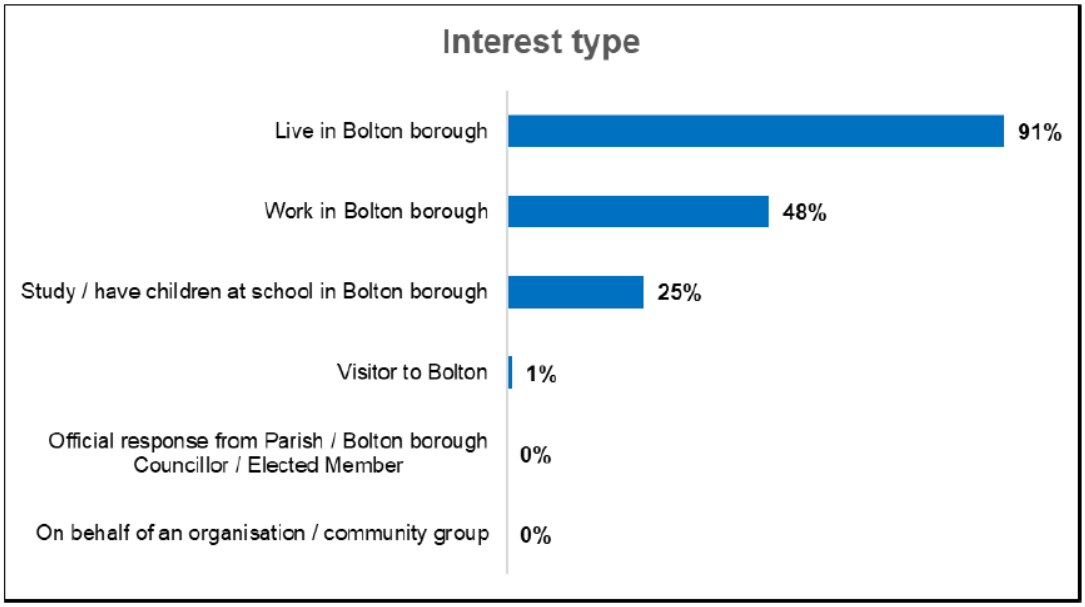
- *Ask central government to either increase its funding because it's not even funding statutory services completely.*
- *Everyone in Bolton Council, even at the top, and all local authorities, should go on strike until central government stops cutting things and instead reinstates some of the lost funding.*
- *Lobby the government for more funding, and refuse to impose any further cuts*

Other alternatives

Other suggestions included reviewing contracts and looking to provide more services in-house; reducing demand from immigrants; stopping corruption and making cuts to Public Health.

9. Interest type

Those taking part in the digital survey were asked what interest they had in the proposal. Of the 631 individuals responding, 91% live in Bolton, 48% work in Bolton and one-quarter study or have children at school in the borough. 1% are visitors to the borough. In addition, just under 1% of the replies were from individuals responding in an official capacity (Councillor, business, organisation, community group or other).

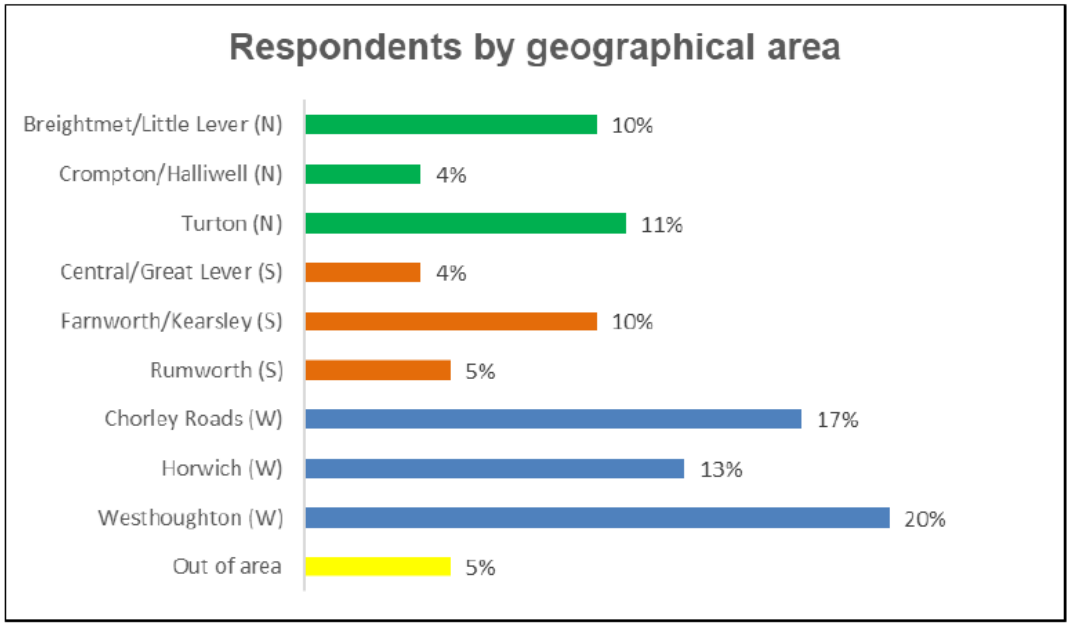


Base: 631

10a. Demographics: Geographical location

The table below outlines the demographics of respondents by geographical district. A total of 536 respondents provided a full, valid postcode. Residents in the West of the borough

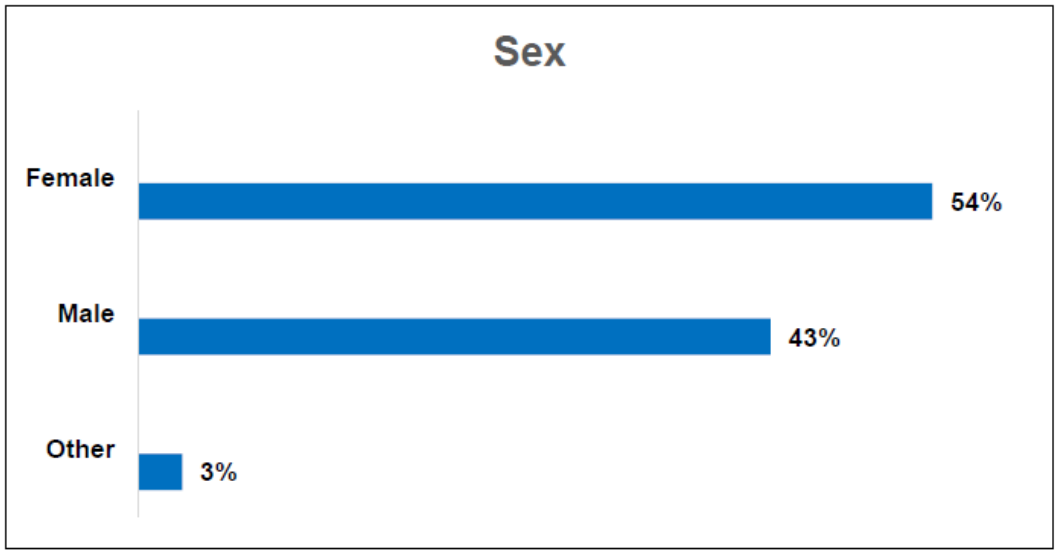
(blue bars) represent half (50%) of responses received. One-quarter (25%) of comments were received from residents in the North of the borough (green bars) and 19% of responses came from residents in the South of the borough (orange bars). 5% of responses came from residents from outside of the borough (yellow bar).



Base: 536

10b. Gender

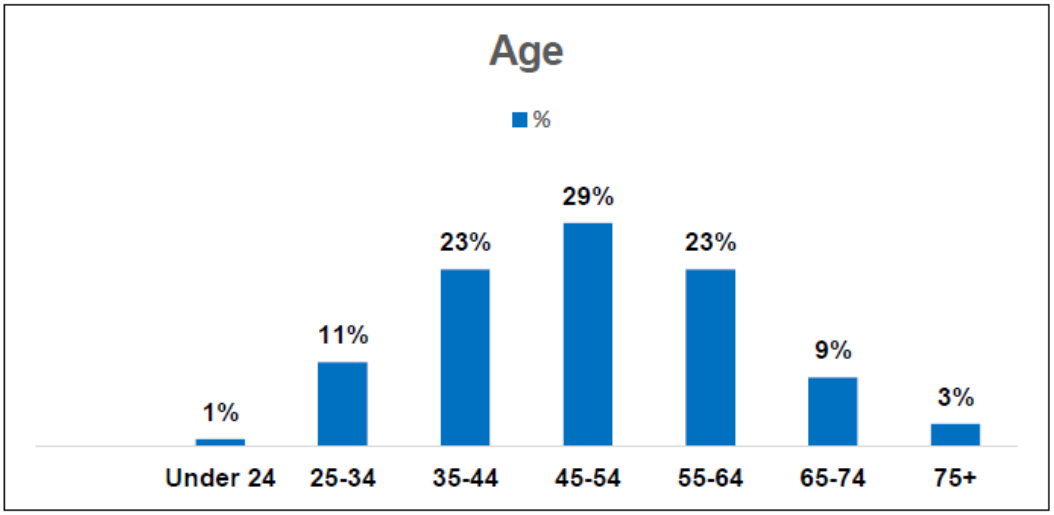
603 responses were received providing the respondent's gender. 54% of respondents identity as female, 43% as male and 3% of respondents identify as 'other'.



Base: 603

10c. Age

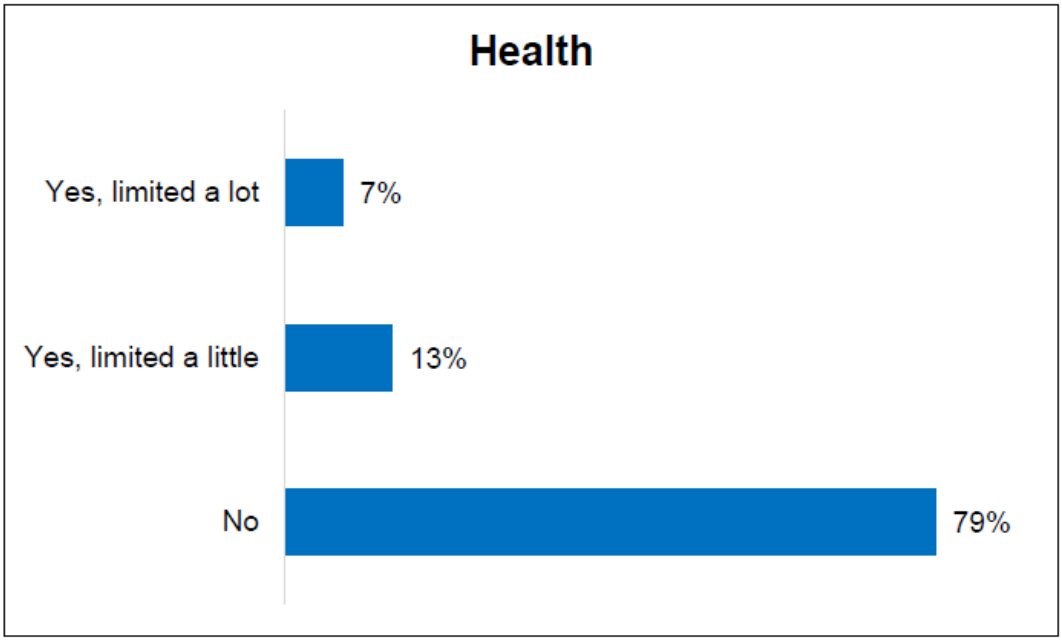
Responses were received from individuals in all age categories. 12% of respondents are under the age of 34 years. Three-quarters (75%) of respondents are aged between 35 – 64 years. 12% of responses were received from individuals above the age of 65 years.



Base: 602

10d. Health and disability

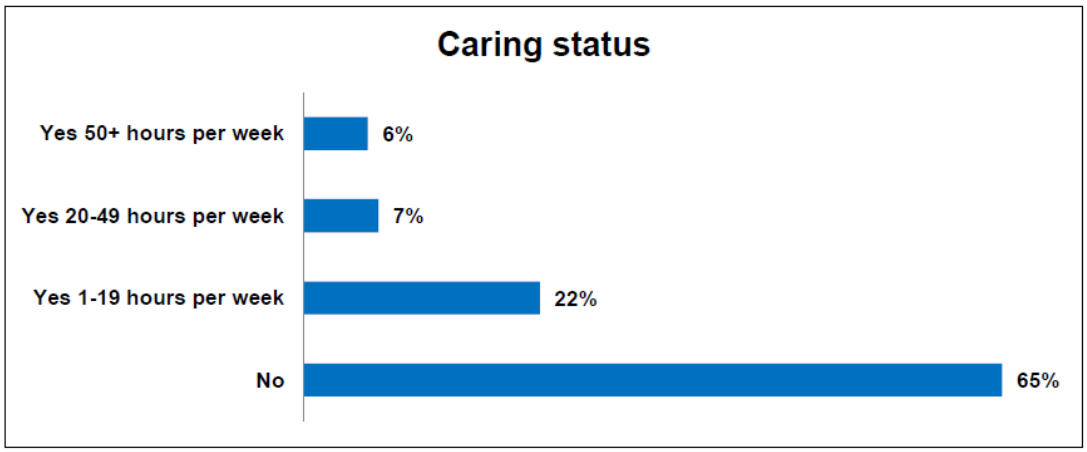
Of the 607 stakeholders responding to the consultation, One-fifth (20%) have their day-today activities limited due to a long-term physical or mental health condition or illness.



Base: 607

10e. Caring responsibility

Over one-third (35%) of individuals taking part in the consultation look after or provide some form of help or support to family members, friends, neighbours and others, who need help because they have a long-term physical or mental ill-health / are disabled or have problems relating to old age.

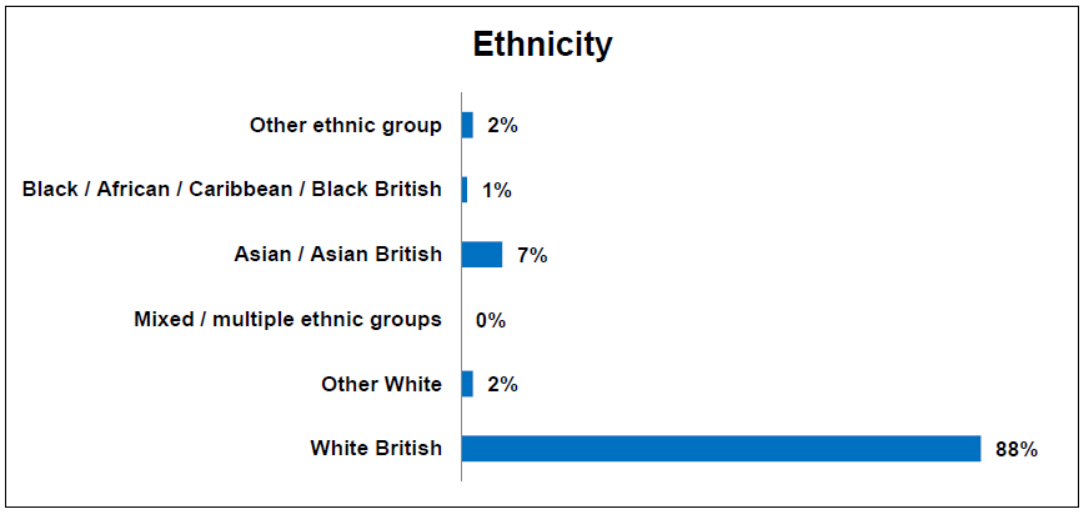


Base: 598

9g. Ethnicity

Of the 593 responses received, 88% are from residents and stakeholders who identify as being 'white

British'. 12% of responses are representative of communities other than 'white-British', with 7% of those being from the Asian/Asian British community.



Base: 593

Summary

Between the 12th December 2022 and the 9th January 2023 Bolton Council ran a public consultation, seeking feedback on the proposals to make £4.3 million of savings. 634

residents reflected upon the proposals. 72% of residents agreed that budget reductions needed to be made; 89% were aware of the need for the council to change the way it delivers its services; and 34% believe the council is doing its best under difficult circumstances.

Residents were asked to consider where the council should prioritise cuts to services and five key areas were proposed. 96% agreed that the council should make better use of assets; 94% agreed that the council should maximise income from external organisation; 84% agreed that spending should be maintained for Public Health services; 75% agreed that a review was needed on staff efficiencies and a reduction to staff costs; and 63% agreed that a review on fees and charges needed to be carried out.

Residents and stakeholders took the time to reflect on the proposal to increase Council Tax by 3.99%. This was opposed by 68% of respondents. Those choosing to comment (63) stated a 2% increase would be a more appropriate rise.

As part of the consultation, Bolton Council were keen to understand what impact the proposal would have on residents and stakeholders. The top three areas of impact where around the financial affect as a result of Council Tax rises; the reduction of services not being appropriate or offering value for money; and the socio-economic impact for in work residents and those not claiming benefits. Job security for Bolton Council staff was also reflected upon. In addition, concerns were raised about the impact to other diverse and protected groups.

Residents and stakeholders were provided with the opportunity to make alternative suggestions of how the council could make savings. The three top themes suggested the council should revise staff salaries and make efficiencies; increase revenues and use more of the council's reserves; as well as having a more considered approach to spending.

Of those that responded to the consultation, 91% live in the borough, with 50% of all responses living in the West of the borough. 54% of responses were from females, 43% male and 3% stating 'other'. 75% of responses were received from individuals aged between 35 years and 64 years. 20% of stakeholders are limited due to a long-term physical or mental health condition or illness. 35% have caring responsibilities. 88% of responses were received from stakeholders who are white British and 12% from other ethnically diverse communities.

Bolton Council

2023/24 Budget consultation

Consultation runs 12th December 2022 to midday 9th January 2023

We are seeking your views on proposed options for the 2023/24 budget, which has been drawn up in light of the continuing financial challenges faced by Bolton Council. Please complete this questionnaire online if possible, by searching online for https://bit.ly/3H9tQym or by going to the Active consultations' page on www.bolton.gov.uk.

On 12th December 2022, the council's Cabinet approved a plan to deal with a £15 million budget gap.

Whilst we have tried to protect the most vulnerable people in our society and the government has indicated there will be increased funding for social care, on-going savings need to be made because of a number of challenges. These include expected reductions in other forms of funding from central Government, rising demand for council services, increases in inflation, a staff pay award and rising energy costs. Whilst these may be partly balanced by a proposed increase in Council Tax, the introduction of increased Government funding for social care and better than expected income from Business Rates and Council Tax, we still need to make savings of £15 million.

We propose to do this in three ways:
- £4.3 million from savings across the council.
- £0.9m one-off contribution from the NHS
- £10m from reserves.

We are now consulting on the proposals to deal with the budget gap, and on the proposed rise in Council Tax. By taking part in this consultation, residents and other stakeholders can help guide and shape the difficult decisions that need to be made.
Your views will be considered alongside other information to help Bolton Council decide on the final budget option in February 2023. Further consultation will be done during 2023 once detailed options have been drawn up.
Please read the full report and background documents before completing this questionnaire. These can be found online at www.bolton.gov.uk/directory/13/consultations/category/195, or ring 01204 334875 for paper copies of any documents mentioned in this consultation.

Your response - keeping your data safe

If you're responding as an individual you won't be identified in any report; your responses will be anonymised and grouped with responses from other people. All questions are optional so please feel free to skip any that you prefer not to answer.

Reports may be made public. If you're responding in an official capacity your response may be published but no personal details will be included.

Any personal data you provide will be held securely, in line with our retention schedule and privacy policy which can be found online www.bolton.gov.uk/data-protection-freedom-information/privacy-notices. We use Snap Surveys professional software to collect and process your data. Their privacy policy can be found online www.snapsurveys.com/survey-software/privacy-policy-uk/. Snap Surveys Ltd. follow the UK General Data Protection Regulation.

Our proposals

Meeting the savings target will be very difficult and cannot be done without affecting services. Here's the approach we're proposing:

Review fees and charges
We propose to review the fees and charges for services to organisations and the public. Our fees and charges need to remain competitive, but we need to cover our costs and bring in income. This means that the public and organisations would see an increase in the amount they have to pay for some of our services.

Review staff efficiency and reduce staffing costs
By looking at new ways of working it's often possible to allow staff to work more efficiently. This could include combining teams to remove duplicated work and using technology to speed up process. We would also review posts when someone leaves to see if they need to be replaced or if the work can be done in a different way.

Make maximum use of assets - buildings, vehicles and equipment
We would carry out a thorough review of all buildings and machinery that the council owns, to make sure they are being used efficiently.
For example, if a centre was only used in the evening we could look at moving daytime services into that building. By making maximum use of buildings that we own, we could rent out or sell any that were no longer needed and stop paying rent on any buildings that we lease.
We would review any vehicles and equipment that the council owns or leases. We would look at repairing rather than buying new, not replacing vehicles as often and trying to make sure that vehicles are not stood idle if they could be used elsewhere - such as by reviewing routes used by our transport services to increase the number of people on each journey.

Maximise income from external organisations
This would involve making the most of any commercial opportunities available to the council. For example, we could investigate ways to increase the number of film and tv companies who pay to use our locations.

Maintain spending on Public Health
Public Health provide preventative services aimed at helping people stay healthy. This can reduce the need for costly medical and social care in the future. Due to the one-off contribution NHS will make to our budget in 2023/24, we propose not to make any cuts to the council's Public Health department.

Q1. Please state how strongly you agree or disagree with each of the following proposals.

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No opinion
Review fees and charges	○	○	○	○	○
Review staff efficiency and reduce staffing costs	○	○	○	○	○
Make maximum use of assets - buildings, vehicles and equipment	○	○	○	○	○
Maximise income from external organisations	○	○	○	○	○
Maintain spending on Public Health	○	○	○	○	○

Council Tax

Council Tax is made up of a General Levy, which covers general services provided by Bolton Council, an Adult Social Care Levy, a GM Mayoral Levy which covers fire services and the Greater Manchester Mayor and the Police and Crime Commissioner levy. People living in Blackrod, Horwich and Westhoughton pay an additional Parish Levy to cover their Town Council.

We are proposing a 1.99% increase in the General Levy plus a 2% rise for Adult Social Care. If this proposal goes ahead, this 3.99% rise would add £43.17 a year to a Band A property and £57.56 a year to a Band C property.
Any increases in the GM Mayoral Levy and Parish Levies would be on top of the 3.99% rise.

Each 1% rise in Council Tax would bring in £1.3 million, so the proposed rise would bring in an extra £5 million in 2023/24.
If Council Tax did not rise by 3.99%, further cuts would need to be made to services in order to balance the budget.

There would be no change to the Council Tax Support Scheme which allows those in most need to apply for help towards paying their Council Tax.

Q2. Please say how strongly you agree or disagree with the proposal to raise Council Tax by 3.99%

- ◯ Strongly agree - please go to Q5
- ◯ Agree - please go to Q5
- ◯ Disagree - please go to Q3
- ◯ Strongly disagree- please go to Q3
- ◯ No opinion - please go to Q5

UNISON
BOLTON BRANCH

GMB
GMB@WORK

14/01/2023

Joint Response
To
Budget Report 2023/24

INTRODUCTION

It is noted that the budget strategy for 2023/2024 is written to reflect the financial uncertainty that the country is facing, and that mention is given to local financial uncertainty that impacts on the people of Bolton, including employees of Bolton Council and their families.

It feels that the budget again, will further impact the working lives of our members within the authority as they continue having to deliver more with less.

The budget report provides a strategic overview of the service reductions and changes that the council is proposing to deliver, in order to achieve a balanced budget in 2023 to 2024.

With over a decade of continuing austerity the budget report highlights that the council has already made massive cuts to spending over the last decade, totalling around £217m.

The scale of the cuts made over the last ten years, mean that all areas within the council have already reduced service levels and there are now very limited options available to reduce spend that does not directly affect the jobs our members, or the service provision to the residents of Bolton. Beyond 2022/2023 it is noted that there remain key funding issues that are yet to be confirmed.

Whilst this response is written as part of the initial budget consultation, it is based upon the overall proposed budget figures and as detail behind the figures is not yet worked up it is not possible to make detailed comments on many of the proposed cuts and changes to services.

SAVINGS PROPOSALS

The Budget Report issued for consultation details a range of savings across all directorates. The report references job reductions across a number of departments, however the “TBC” across Childrens Services is not helpful and needs to be addressed immediately – as this may be read as a total closure of Youth Services.

For those posts remaining, deletion of vacancies and reduced service budgets mean that those remaining continue to face the prospect of balancing the increasing demand for services against dwindling resources.

The report also comments on last years pay settlement, stating that only 2% was built into the original 2022/23 budget giving an additional in-year cost of £12.7m. It should be noted that staff pay has either been frozen or increased below inflation for over ten years, pushing many staff in to poverty.

Reviews leading to a reduction in services, for example supported housing services will immediately affect the most vulnerable in the borough. Supported housing is available to allow those that need assistance to live independently in their own homes, reducing this or similar services will lead to vulnerable people either going into more expensive care or to becoming more isolated within their own homes.

It's noted with interest that savings can be made via digital efficiencies and maximising processes – either management have not been doing this previously and therefore there are savings to be made, or they have been doing this and these savings have already been actioned.

Similarly with efficiencies in (Childrens Services) contracts with 3rd parties. What efficiencies are believed to be available and if made what are the expected knock on effects to other more acute/expensive services? Also, if management know there are efficiencies, why haven't they been made previously? More widely, contracts with external services providers should be expecting to rise due their increased cost pressures. Putting a further squeeze on budgets, not the other way around.

CONCLUSIONS

It is noted that the Council has held consultation meetings with the trade unions, and has sought comments from staff, the council must commit to maintaining an active consultation process as the options to achieve the anticipated reduction of £4.3m are developed.

The proposal deletion of posts resulting in potential job losses is too vague to make any comment but causes concern, especially the line against Youth Services – 'TBC' stated against those in-scope does not provide those in the service with any reassurance

Reviewing 'support services' must recognise that many of these so called 'back office' functions are carried out by often low paid women and are vital to sustaining front line services and should not be viewed as an easy option to cut

Reductions in staffing levels through the deletion of vacant posts, will lead to increased pressure on the remaining staff. Especially in at time when services are needed more than ever. As such the unions would require that there will be no increased workload as a result of any review.

One way to create service efficiencies with 3rd party providers would be to look to bring these services back in-house and end outsourcing of services at Corporate Property and Bolton Cares.

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) and the Bolton JSNA, provide an overview of Bolton and wellbeing of its residents:

- 26% of the Bolton population live in an area that is among the 10% most deprived nationally
- 56% of the population live in an area that is among the 30% most deprived nationally
- Only 71% adults in Bolton are in employment (lower than England and NW rates)
- Bolton residents experience poorer health than average for England and have a shorter life expectancy than both national and NW averages

Reducing services to vulnerable people goes against the Council's own priorities of giving Bolton's children the best start in life, improving the health and wellbeing of residents and of allowing older people to stay healthier for longer.

The Budget Report details the financial aspects; however it does not describe the impact these cuts will have to the people of Bolton. It must be seen as an attack on the vulnerable and those that depend on the services to retain independence and their quality of life. Cuts to services continues the austerity package by the Tory government

As the budget report states, the indicative budget reduction for 2024/25 is currently £21.7m following the use of reserves for 23/24 and without intervention from central government sooner rather than later it is difficult to think how services will continue to deliver when they have been sliced to the bone.