

# Bolton Council

<b>Report to:</b>	Council		
<b>Date of meeting:</b>	17 <sup>th</sup> February 2021		
<b>Report of:</b>	Deputy Chief Executive	<b>Report Number:</b>	3545
<b>Reporting Officer:</b>	Sue Johnson, Deputy Chief Executive	<b>Telephone Number:</b>	x1502
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Sue Johnson, Deputy Chief Executive	<b>Telephone Number:</b>	x1502
<b>Report title:</b>	Budget Report 2021/22		
<b>Not confidential</b>			
This report does not contain information which warrants its consideration in the absence of the press or members of the public.			
<b>Purpose:</b>	To consolidate service budgets to provide the Council's overall 2021/22 budget; To consider the options for council tax for 2021/22; To report on the Financial Arrangements account for 2021/22.		
<b>Recommendations:</b>	That Cabinet recommends to Council <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. The budget for 2021/22</li> <li>ii. The council tax for 2021/22</li> <li>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</li> </ul>		
<b>Decision:</b>			
<b>Background documents:</b>	Final local government finance settlement: England, 2021 to 2022 <a href="https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/final-local-government-finance-settlement-england-2021-to-2022">https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/final-local-government-finance-settlement-england-2021-to-2022</a> Final Council Tax reports 2021 to 2022 <a href="https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/final-council-tax-reports-2021-to-2022">https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/final-council-tax-reports-2021-to-2022</a> <a href="#">Budget Options report November 2020</a>		

<b>Consultation with other officers</b>			
Finance	n/a		
Legal	Yes	26/1/2021	Helen Gorman
HR	Yes	26/1/2021	Lee Fallows
Climate Change	No		
Equality Impact Assessment	Yes	28/1/21	N. Connell/H.Gorman
Please confirm that the consultation response has been taken into consideration in making the recommendations.			Yes
<b>Vision outcomes</b> 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 Reports to Cabinet on 2<sup>nd</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> November 2020 have outlined the financial challenge facing the council over the next two financial years particularly in light of the pressures in Social Care and the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. These reports identified a savings requirement covering the years 2021/22 and 2022/23 of £39.5m, the vast majority of which (£37.2m) needs to be found in 2021/22 in order to set a balanced budget.
- 1.2 The assumptions built into the 2021/22 budget included 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 17<sup>th</sup> December 2020 and options for the council tax levy for 2021/22.

## **2 UPDATE FROM CABINET ON 8<sup>th</sup> FEBRUARY 2021**

- 2.1 At its meeting on 8<sup>th</sup> February 2021, Cabinet recommended to Council
- 2.1.1 That in respect of the Revenue Budget 2021/22 the Cabinet recommends to the Council the following;
- That the Council Tax for 2021/22 be increased by 3.8%, represented by a 2.5% increase for Adult Social Care and a 1.3% general increase
  - As a result of changed assumptions outlined below, amend the savings target from £39.5 to £37.2m.
  - The savings target is split £32.3m in 2021/22 and £4.9m in 2022/23.
- 2.1.2 Additionally, with regard to business rates the Financial Secretary to the Treasury made a Written Ministerial Statement in February 2021 which asks billing authorities to consider waiting until the Chancellor has set out his plans at the Budget on 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2021, before issuing business rates bills for 2021/22.

## **3 LOCAL GOVERNMENT SETTLEMENT 2021/22**

- 3.1 The settlement itself, as expected given the current climate, was a one-year settlement, hence no indication of local government funding from 2022/23 onwards. Key points to note were;
- 3.1.1 Core spending power (the grand total of all the council's income) to increase on average by 4.5%. It should be noted the vast majority of this increase is based upon the assumption that councils will increase their council tax by the maximum permissible.
- 3.1.2 Councils are again permitted to increase the general council tax levy by 1.99%. The Adult Social Care precept can increase by up to 3% in 2021/22 although there is the flexibility to spread this 2% in 2021/22 and 1% in 2022/23.
- 3.1.3 New Homes Bonus (NHB) payments continue to be reduced (£406k to be received in 2021/22 and £99k in 2022/23).
- 3.1.4 The overall reduction in NHB funding is being used to fund additional one-off grants for Social Care (Bolton will receive £2.5m).

- 3.1.5 Local Council Support Grant - this is provided to authorities in recognition of the increased costs of providing local council tax support following the pandemic. Bolton's allocation is £3.2m.
- 3.1.6 Lower Tier Services grant – a one-off grant to help ensure the overall range of increases in Core spending Power is equalized at 4.5%. Bolton's allocation is £434k.
- 3.1.7 Tranche 5 Emergency Funding – following the 4 emergency funding payments of £26m in 2020/21, an additional £9m will be received to cover Covid-related expenditure in 2021/22.
- 3.1.8 Sales, Fees and Charges compensation scheme – an additional payment to be made in quarter 1 2021/22 only.
- 3.1.9 Given the significant deficits councils are expected to see within their Collection Fund account in 2020/21 approval has been given to spread this over the financial years 2021/22 to 2023/24.
- 3.1.10 Tax Income Guarantee Scheme – The scheme funds 75% of irrecoverable losses in council tax and business rates and is separate to the 3-year collection fund spreading above. The question of “irrecoverable” has not yet been addressed and we are not yet sure how this will be measured over time.
- 3.1.11 Section 31 business reliefs – no new reliefs were announced although the Chancellor outlined plans to look at these again in early 2021.
- 3.2 It was also announced that there would be a public sector pay freeze covering most local authority employees. The only exception to this is the award of a £250 increase for any employee earning less than £24k per annum.

#### **4 AMENDMENTS TO THE ORIGINAL SAVINGS TARGET**

- 4.1 The impact of a public sector pay freeze, together with a slightly improved Collection Fund deficit in 20/21, offset by a provision for increased demand in leisure and CICT means the savings target can be reduced by £3m to £36.5m

<b><u>Changes since November Cabinet</u></b>	
Pay award 21/22 - take out further 2% (i.e reduce to 0%)	-2.3
Add back - pay award for earners less than £24k	+0.4
Pay award 22/23 - take out a further 1% (i.e. reduce to 1%)	-1.1
Collection Fund reduced deficit 20/21	-1.0
Emerging demand for Leisure and CICT provision	+1.0
Total	-3.0

- 4.2 As a result of one-off grant funds outlined above the £36.5m is now split £31.6m in 2021/22 and £4.9m in 2022/23
- 4.3 Proposals for the £3.0m reduced savings target will be outlined at the meeting.

#### **5 GOVERNMENT SPENDING PLANS**

- 5.1 As members will be aware, the council has had to find significant savings over the last 8 years, totaling almost £190m by the end of 2020/21. Adding in the proposed 2021-23 savings target takes the figure to around £225m.

5.2 Beyond 2021/22 there are some key funding issues yet to be confirmed which could impact further on the council.

5.3 Fair Funding Review (FFR)

5.3.1 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 has pushed this back further to 2022/23.

5.3.2 It should be noted there is some uncertainty as to whether or not this will happen in 2022/23. Based upon a response to a question in the House of Commons the Secretary of State said;

*"We all—certainly those of us on the Government Benches—would agree that we need an updated and fairer method for distributing public funds within local government. This year would have been the wrong time to bring that forward. ... There might be an opportunity to do it next year [2022/23], and my Department will work with the Treasury to review that."*

5.3.3 According to the 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.

5.4 Business Rates

5.4.1 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 had announced that from 2020 business rates retention will be 75%, 1% of this being passed to the Fire Authority and 25% to central government. This has also been deferred until 2022/23

5.4.2 The business rates reset initially intended to be implemented in 2021/22 has also been deferred until at least 2022/23. 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 2020/21. This makes forecasting business rates beyond 2021/22 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.

5.4.3 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 Business rates pooling was introduced as part of the business rates retention scheme in April 2013. Under the pooling arrangement if the Pool in aggregate is a

top up pool it can retain any levy on growth from tariff authority members that would have otherwise been payable to central government.

- 6.2 However, when councils collect insufficient business rates according to a pre-determined formula they are deemed to enter “safety net”. Funding for this comes either from central government, or from the Pool.
- 6.3 The pooling risk lies in accessing safety net assistance. To do this the Pool must in aggregate be in a safety net position. If the pool is not in a safety net position but an individual authority is, assistance to the safety net threshold must be funded from within the Pool.
- 6.4 However, the safety net issue and uncertainty on collection makes the decision to pool in 2021/22 much more complex than in previous years. The following concerns have been identified:
  - 6.4.1 Collection rates for 2020/21 remain uncertain, with many authorities forecasting substantial reductions in rates revenue. This is likely to continue to 2021/22.
  - 6.4.2 The extended retail and nursery relief is set to end on 31 March 2021. This will mean hospitality, leisure and retail hereditaments are liable for rates and there is significant uncertainty around collection from these sectors.
  - 6.4.3 VOA checks and challenges have increased significantly in the first half of the year, with many businesses citing material change in circumstance due to Covid19 as a ground for appeal. The VOA is currently unable to provide any information on the likelihood of checks and challenges being successful or their associated RV reduction. This is likely to reduce the collectable rates in 2021/22 and beyond.
  - 6.4.4 The operation and logistics for financial support for the Collection Fund (spreading deficits over 3 years) is still to be firmed up - it remains unclear how this will work alongside any pooling arrangements.
  - 6.4.5 The Greater Manchester 100% retention pilot is due to end on 31 March 2021 and it has been assumed this will continue to 2021/22.
  - 6.4.6 The intention to pool deadline is set before the Spending Review / Settlement announcement, which makes pooling decisions more difficult.
- 6.5 Given the level of risk and uncertainty around rates collection in 2021/22, cessation of the extended retail and nursery relief and the significant increase in check and challenge received by the VOA relating to Covid-19, there is a genuine risk that a member authority will fall into a safety net position next year.
- 6.6 Due to the risks outlined the Pool has now formally been dissolved meaning safety net assistance would no longer come from the Pool.

## **7 EXPENDITURE FORECAST**

- 7.1 Taking into account the above factors this is the expenditure forecast for 2021/22 and 2022/23:

	Forecast 2021/22 100% Business Rates £000s	Forecast 2022/23 75% Business Rates £000s
Expenditure		
Previous Year's Budget	441,866	448,865
Schools DSG Change	13,802	
Non School Services		
Inflation	3,009	3,996
Other Corporate	2,767	1,016
Leisure & CICT Demand Provision	1,000	
Adult Social Care Precept	2,891	2,413
Children's and Adult's Demand Growth	5,497	
Insurance	97	
Covid ongoing pressures	6,277	
<b>Savings to be Identified</b>	<b>-32,341</b>	<b>-4,859</b>
Budget Requirement	448,865	451,431

	Forecast 2021/22 100% Business Rates £000s	Forecast 2022/23 75% Business Rates £000s
Resources		
Direct Schools Grant	211,971	211,971
Public Health Funding		
Retained Local Business Rate	79,858	60,886
GMCA Growth contribution		
Section 31 Grants	13,595	10,162
Business Rates Top Up	22,337	45,849
Council Tax Contribution	115,657	120,651
Council Tax Contribution - Adult Social Care	2,891	2,413
Council Tax Contribution - General Levy	1,504	2,401
Collection Fund Balance	-3,000	-3,000
Lower Tier Grant	434	
LCTS Support Grant	3,203	
New Homes Bonus	415	98
Total	448,865	451,431
Council Tax Increase (subject to Council approval)	3.80%	3.99%

- 7.2 As a result of deferring £8m of savings over the 2019-21 period this together with the forecast savings target in 2021/22 means the total indicative savings target for 2021/22 is £32.341m. The indicative savings target for 2022/23 is £4.859m
- 7.3 It should be noted that given the Adult Social Care Precept has been part of the council's budget since 2016/17, this has been assumed to be an ongoing revenue source.
- 7.4 In September 2019, Bolton Council and Bolton CCG signed up to an expanded Section 75 agreement creating a pooled budget for Health and Social Care Services to Adults of approximately £180m. Financial reporting has been jointly produced and monitored via the Joint Commissioning Committee. For Council budget setting purposes and statutory returns, the pooled budget areas are all reported within their relevant service areas. A separate pooled budget report will be taken to the Joint Commissioning Committee

## **8 FORECASTING CAUTION**

- 8.1 As members will appreciate there is considerable uncertainty in forecasting expenditure costs and income losses as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. The additional lockdowns in September 2020 (locally) and the two further lockdowns in November 2020 and January 2021 have added another degree of uncertainty.
- 8.1.1 The furlough scheme has been extended until the end of April 21. The impact of Covid-19 is likely to result in further job losses which in turn may lead to more people claiming Council Tax Support. This has the effect of reducing our council tax base (the number we use to calculate the overall council tax collection amount)
- 8.1.2 As lockdown came into effect a number of customers requested deferral of their council tax payments and / or moved from 10 monthly payments to 12 monthly payments. Both scenarios had made it difficult to compare year-on-year actual council tax collected and hence forecast the year end position
- 8.2 With regard to business rates the picture is even less clear. The Chancellor announced in his March 2020 budget 100% relief for businesses in the hospitality and retail sectors. Instead of businesses paying the council business rates, they paid nothing and the council is re-imbursed directly by the government via a Section 31 grant for business rates lost. This amounts to £54m and meant our collectable business rates reduced overnight to circa £40m. In the November statement no new discounts and reliefs were announced in the settlement. Ministers have promised to consider "*options for further Covid-19 related support ... [and] ... outline plans for 2021-22 reliefs in the New Year*".
- 8.2.1 Should Section 31 grant continue beyond 2020/21 this would give the council some certainty. Should it be removed after 2020/21 and businesses fail this again will have a significant impact on the amount the council collects from business rates.

## 9 RESERVES

- 9.1 The council estimates its reserves balance to be £101m at the end of 2020/21 before the DSG balance as follows;

	01-Apr-20	31-Mar-21
	£m	£m
Reserves we cannot touch (schools etc...)	-18.84	-13.87
Reserves we must have (audit requirements)	-10.66	-10.66
Reserves to support the 21-23 budget process	-10.05	-0.92
Reserves for known insurance claims / self-insurance	-21.34	-21.34
Reserves to fund our existing capital programme	-43.37	-31.54
Reserves set aside for revenue commitments (Looked After Children etc..)	-47.71	-22.53
<b>Total Reserves (excluding DSG Deficit)</b>	<b>-151.97</b>	<b>-100.86</b>
DSG Deficit	12.70	16.72
<b>Overall Net Reserves Position</b>	<b>-139.27</b>	<b>-84.14</b>

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

## 10 FINANCIAL RISKS

- 10.1 Members will be aware that the Deputy Chief Executive 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 G. However, in summary this advice is as follows:

- 10.1.1 Currently it is estimated that available Balances as at the 31st March 2021 will be £10.66m. The Deputy Chief Executive' advice to Members is that, as a minimum, Balances of £10.0m or higher should be maintained, based upon the Deputy Chief Executive' 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 Deputy Chief Executive 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 2021/22 for the general levy will be 2%.
- 11.2 For Adult Social Care (ASC), the council can raise this by 3% although 1% can be deferred into 2022/23
- 11.3 A 1% swing in the rate broadly equates to a £1.1m gain or loss in council tax income. This budget has been prepared as follows:
- the Adult Social Care precept is set at 2.5% for 2021/22.
  - the general levy is set at 1.3% for 2021/22.

11.4 Whilst there has been approval to change the Local Council Tax Support Scheme, this has been deferred until 2022/23.

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

	Bolton Charge 2021/22	Adult Social Care	General Levy	Bolton Charge 2021/22
		2.5% Increase	1.3% Increase	Overall 3.8% Increase
Band A	£1,010.78	£25.27	£13.14	£1,049.19
Band B	£1,179.26	£29.48	£15.33	£1,224.07
Band C	£1,347.71	£33.69	£17.52	£1,398.92
Band D	£1,516.18	£37.90	£19.71	£1,573.79
Band E	£1,853.10	£46.32	£24.09	£1,923.51
Band F	£2,190.05	£54.74	£28.47	£2,273.26
Band G	£2,526.96	£63.17	£32.85	£2,622.98
Band H	£3,032.36	£75.80	£39.42	£3,147.58

11.6 This equates to an additional 74p per week for Band A properties which are more than 40% of the overall tax base

11.7 The amount generated from council tax is as follows:

		20/21			21/22	
		£	£		£	£
<b>Band D</b>						
Basic Council Tax - previous year		1,486.46			1,516.18	
Council Tax General Levy	0.0%	0.00		1.3%	19.71	
Council Tax Rise ASC	2.0%	29.72		2.5%	37.90	
Basic Council Tax			1,516.18			1,573.79
Tax Base			76,173			76,281
Basic Council Tax Collected (£'000s)			115,492			120,051
Add Parish Precepts (£000s)			423			426
Council Tax Collected (£000s)			115,915			120,477

## 12 **MAYORAL PRECEPT (tbc 12<sup>th</sup> February)**

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 2021/22 the amounts are as follows

12.3.1 For the Mayoral General (including Fire Services) a 0% increase (tbc)

12.3.2 A £10 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)
	£0 (0%) Increase	£10 (5%) Increase
Band A	£60.63	£145.53
Band B	£70.73	£169.78
Band C	£80.84	£194.04
Band D	£90.95	£218.30
Band E	£111.16	£266.81
Band F	£131.37	£315.32
Band G	£151.58	£363.83
Band H	£181.90	£436.60

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**

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

	2020/21	2021/22	Increase
	£	£	%
Blackrod	£69,847	£71,847	2.86%
Horwich	£202,682	£204,559	0.92%
Westhoughton	£149,585	£149,595	0.01%

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 Equivalentents 2021/22
Blackrod	1,982
Horwich	7,518

Westhoughton	8,610
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13.4 The resultant additional Council Tax in each Town Council area is as follows:

	Blackrod	Horwich	Westhoughton
Band A	£24.17	£18.14	£11.58
Band B	£28.19	£21.16	£13.51
Band C	£32.22	£24.19	£15.44
Band D	£36.25	£27.21	£17.37
Band E	£44.31	£33.26	£21.23
Band F	£52.36	£39.30	£25.09
Band G	£60.42	£45.35	£28.95
Band H	£72.50	£54.42	£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	£1,279.52	£1,273.49	£1,266.93	£1,255.35
Band B	£1,492.77	£1,485.74	£1,478.09	£1,464.58
Band C	£1,706.02	£1,697.99	£1,689.24	£1,673.80
Band D	£1,919.29	£1,910.25	£1,900.41	£1,883.04
Band E	£2,345.79	£2,334.74	£2,322.71	£2,301.48
Band F	£2,772.31	£2,759.25	£2,745.04	£2,719.95
Band G	£3,198.81	£3,183.74	£3,167.34	£3,138.39
Band H	£3,838.58	£3,820.50	£3,800.82	£3,766.08

14.2 The overall increase equates to 87p 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 17<sup>th</sup> February 2021. 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. The most recent listing came into force on 1st April 2017. 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 2017 RV list as at 31st December 2020 is £234.92m. This is a decrease of 0.11% from the 31st December 2019 list (£235.18m).

## **17 EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

- 17.1 It is important to recognise that achieving a balanced budget at this level, following the significant reductions that have already been made, will be much more challenging than in the last two years.
- 17.2 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 well as to individual service reviews.
- 17.3 The EIA is attached at Appendix I.

## **18 BUDGET PROPOSALS 2021-2023: CONSULTATION SUMMARY**

- 18.1 A report setting out budget proposals for the financial years 2021/22 and 2022/23 was approved for consultation by Bolton Council’s Executive Cabinet on 30<sup>th</sup> November 2020. The consultation process was a public consultation, enabling any Bolton resident, staff member, elected member, partner organisation, business or other stakeholder to comment on the budget proposals in the published report using an online questionnaire (also available in hard copy). Consultation took place from 1st December 2020 to 12<sup>th</sup> January 2021, a period of six weeks.
- 18.2 Staff
- 18.3 All staff received a letter, either via a work/personal email or by post, informing them about the budget report and options, staff briefing and consultation. The staff briefing took place as an online event on Monday 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2020, to ensure compliance with Covid-19 health and safety policy. Staff were invited to submit questions about the briefing and a Frequently Asked Questions document was shared in response. Staff were also signposted to a range of support options. Team and one-to-one meetings as required were provided by managers following the briefing.
- 18.4 Other Stakeholders
- 18.5 Details of the report and the consultation were shared with elected members, trades unions, Bolton Vision Partners and Greater Manchester Chamber of Commerce. Meetings were held with the trades unions to brief them about the proposals and an ongoing dialogue was held. The Deputy Chief Executive also met with Bolton’s Voluntary and Community Sector Forum online to share details of the budget proposals and answer questions. A comprehensive communication plan was

implemented to raise awareness of the review across the borough, which included a press briefing and promotion via social media. A follow up email was sent to Bolton Vision Partners to ask them to encourage their representees/members to engage with the consultation.

- 18.6 A total of 359 individuals completed the survey, including representative responses from a number of organisations across the borough.
- 18.7 Respondents were asked to comment on the council's five strategic areas for delivering the budget. Overall, participants of the consultation agreed to the approach; 88% agreed that the most vulnerable should be impacted least, 56% agreed to moving from universal services to targeting provision and services for those most in need, 83% agreed that the council should maximise economic prosperity, 77% agreed that the council should seek to minimise the impact on staff and avoid compulsory redundancy where possible, and 80% agreed that the council should make savings from management and administration where possible, before frontline services.
- 18.8 Just over half of respondents (56%) agreed with the proposals put forward to raise Council Tax (assuming a 1.99% increase, subject to approval and an additional 2% for Adult Social Care, subject to approval). However, just under one-third of respondents disagreed, with participants outlining their concerns and the possible financial consequences of a price increase.
- 18.9 Respondents were asked to reflect upon the proposals put forward within the budget review. 76% agreed that the council should seek to have more effective partnership working, reviewing the scope to pool resources. Respondents were particularly opposed to the proposal to 'reduce support for non-statutory services', whereby 58% stated they disagreed.
- 18.10 When asked about 'managing change', 68% of respondents accepted that budget reductions have to be made. 72% were aware of the need for the council to change the way it delivers its services. 38% believe the council is doing its best under difficult circumstances.
- 18.11 Respondents were asked to comment on how the proposals would impact on them or their families, 287 comments were received. Impacts were primarily associated with service reductions [157], increased costs [108], job concerns [80], the effect on people's health [40], increased use of other services [14], the possibility of having to move house [10], and reductions in the amount they spent supporting the local economy [10]. The effect on those who were young [40], disabled [34], elderly [32], a carer [11] or volunteers [11] was also highlighted.
- 18.12 Respondents were given the opportunity to provide alternative solutions, 275 suggestions were made. The most common suggestions were to reduce staff costs [89], increase revenue or use reserves [82], and to review management and leadership [78]. Other ideas included realising assets [42], partnership working [42], proactive spending [36], further service reduction [35], digitisation / correspondence savings [23], increased in-house service delivery / contract reviews [21], reduction in projects and events [18] environmental improvements [16] and ideas for the review of staffing [11].
- 18.13 Formal responses were also received from Bolton Community and Voluntary Services (CVS) and a joint response from trades unions – UNISON and GMB. These

responses can be found in full, alongside the full consultation analysis within Appendix J

## **19**    **RECOMMENDATIONS**

19.1    That Cabinet recommends to Council;

- (a)    The Budget for 2021/22
- (b)    The Council Tax for 2021/22
- (c)    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

## **20**    **APPENDICES**

Appendix A	General Fund Summary
Appendix B	Subjective Analysis
Appendix C	Savings Options 2021-23
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	Strategic Equality Impact Assessment
Appendix J	Consultation Responses

**GENERAL FUND SUMMARY**

	<b>2020/21</b>	<b>2021/22</b>	<b>2022/23</b>
	<b>Original Budget £000</b>	<b>Original Estimate £000</b>	<b>Original Estimate £000</b>
Children's Services	244,751	262,945	263,726
Adult Services	65,569	74,816	79,011
Public Health	18,074	18,504	18,819
Environmental Services	19,251	21,070	21,295
Development & Regeneration	7,636	7,177	7,325
Housing	1,295	1,228	1,231
Property Services	7,515	7,856	8,016
Central etc	22,549	27,697	28,180
Financing and Investing	8,105	14,801	15,518
Levies	39,859	39,859	39,859
Other Financial Services	2,761	5,253	5,651
Savings Requirement to be allocated 21/22		-32,341	-32,341
Savings Requirement to be allocated 22/23			-4,859
<b>Net Exp</b>	<b>437,365</b>	<b>448,865</b>	<b>451,431</b>
Parishes	422	426	426
<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>437,787</b>	<b>449,291</b>	<b>451,857</b>
<b>Income</b>			
Direct Schools Grant	198,169	211,971	211,971
Retained local business rates	95,388	93,453	71,047
Business Rates Top-Up	21,326	22,337	45,849
Council Tax Contribution - Base Adjustment	113,228	115,657	120,651
Council Tax Contribution - Adult Social Care	2,264	2,891	2,413
Council Tax Contribution - General Levy	0	1,504	2,401
Council Tax contribution - Parishes	422	426	426
Collection Fund Balance	300	-3,000	-3,000
New Homes Bonus	505	415	100
Lower Tier Grant	0	434	0
LCTS Support Grant	0	3,203	0
Reserves	6,185	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>437,787</b>	<b>449,291</b>	<b>451,858</b>
Council Tax Increase	2.00%	3.80%	3.99%

**SUBJECTIVE ANALYSIS**

	2020/21 Original Estimate	2021/22 Original Estimate
<b>Expenditure</b>		
Employees	237,946	241,514
Premises	31,937	32,975
Transport	18,277	15,326
Supplies and Services	89,895	104,338
Agency / Third Party	141,915	201,612
Transfer Payments	143,608	93,615
Capital Costs	15,735	17,360
Savings to be Allocated 2021/22		-32,341
<b>Total Expenditure</b>	<b>679,313</b>	<b>674,399</b>
<b>Income</b>		
Grants & Contributions	153,118	152,137
Customer & Client Receipts	70,292	65,858
Rent	6,126	5,112
Interest & Dividends	6,212	2,427
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>235,748</b>	<b>225,534</b>
Net Expenditure *	443,565	448,865
* Before Direct Schools Grant of	198,169	211,971

**DIRECTORATE OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES SAVINGS REQUIREMENT 2021-23**

OPTION	BUDGET 2020/21	SAVINGS 2021/22	ESTIMATED STAFF IMPACT			
	£'000	£'000	FTE IN SCOPE	FTE DELETED	FTE VACANT	FTE DISPLACED
Reduction of agency spend		300	0	0	0	0
Review of all grants	500	100	0	0	0	0
Review of staffing within the Commissioning and Support Services	5,906	1,450	166.17	51	34.21	16.79
Review of staffing in Education Services	5,533	407	194.38	18.07	18.07	0
Reduction in legal expenditure	900	500	0	0	0	0
Review of resources within Staying Safe	15,817	1,569	350	35	18.41	16.59
Review of new transport models	3,542	350	0	0	0	0
Placement Demand	13,325	4,075	0	0	0	0
Reduction of inflation		540	0	0	0	0
<b>Total Savings Options for Directorate of Children's Services</b>		<b>9,291</b>	<b>710.55</b>	<b>104.07</b>	<b>70.69</b>	<b>33.38</b>

**DIRECTORATE OF ADULT SERVICES SAVINGS REQUIREMENT 2021-23**

OPTION	BUDGET 2020/21	SAVINGS 2021/22	ESTIMATED STAFF IMPACT			
	£'000	£'000	FTE IN SCOPE	FTE DELETED	FTE VACANT	FTE DISPLACED
Transformation of Older Adults, Mental Health and Learning Disability Day Care	3,700	965	0	0	0	0
Review of Income and Subsidies	13,419	2,520	0	0	0	0
Reduction of Inflation	4,000	1,250	0	0	0	0
Review of delivery model of Integrated Equipment Stores	2,019	225	16	5	2	3
Review of staffing in the Adults portfolio	16,477	875	262.79	17	3.5	13.5
Review of Intermediate Tier provision	1,467	1,000	tbc	tbc	tbc	tbc
Care packages and placements demand strategy	34,186	3,650	0	0	0	0
Delivery of a Learning Disability Supported Housing strategy	14,906	1,100	0	0	0	0
Review of all contracts and grants	same as placement	675	0	0	0	0
<b>Total Savings Options for Directorate of Adult Services</b>		<b>12,260</b>	<b>278.79</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>5.5</b>	<b>16.5</b>

**DIRECTORATE OF PUBLIC HEALTH SAVINGS REQUIREMENT 2021-23**

OPTION	BUDGET 2020/21	SAVINGS 21/22	ESTIMATED STAFF IMPACT			
	£'000	£'000	FTE IN SCOPE	FTE DELETED	FTE VACANT	FTE DISPLACED
Change of commissioner for specialist school nursing	120	120	0	0	0	0
Reduction of controllable budgets	650	483	0	0	0	0
Review and reduce public health service contracts	14,027	1,034	0	0	0	0
<b>Total Savings Options for Directorate of Public Health</b>		<b>1,637</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>

**DIRECTORATE OF CORPORATE RESOURCES SAVINGS REQUIREMENT 2021-23**

OPTION	BUDGET 2020/21	SAVINGS 2021/22	ESTIMATED STAFF IMPACT			
	£'000	£'000	FTE IN SCOPE	FTE DELETED	FTE VACANT	FTE DISPLACED
Review of model of financial support services across the council, maximising the benefits of new Oracle IT system	1,965	446	40	10	5	5
Align Council Tax hardship budget to expected demand	400	100	0	0	0	0
Council Tax support scheme increased top slice	115,800	900	0	0	0	0
LWP Budget focus on fuel poverty support to residents	500	100	0	0	0	0
Review of Legal and Democratic Services	1,514	200	37	4	4	0
Review School Appeals processes and provision	36	36	1	1	1	0
New model for One Stop Shop/Contact Centre leveraging benefits of new systems	2,542	234	97	9	9	0
Merge Overpayment Recovery with Accounts Receivable	285	23	12	1	0	1
Review of model of HR support across the council, maximising the benefits of new Oracle IT system	1,701	396	71	8	0	8
Merge Support Services with Publishing Services	356	128	13	4	2	2
Review of MEC	1,601	1,129	20	15	2	13
Review of Neighbourhood Management and Area Forums	672	150	6.62	4	1.62	2.38
Review of Community Safety	499	125	11.6	3	2	1
MRP re-profiling	6,500	1,953	0	0	0	0
Levy and corporate benefits budgets	39,800	691	0	0	0	0
Pay modelling balance	820	820	0	0	0	0
<b>Total Savings Options for Directorate of Corporate Resources</b>		<b>7431</b>	<b>309.22</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>26.62</b>	<b>32.38</b>

**DIRECTORATE OF PLACE SAVINGS REQUIREMENT 2021-23**

OPTION	BUDGET 2020/21	SAVINGS 2021/22	ESTIMATED STAFF IMPACT			
	£'000	£'000	FTE IN SCOPE	FTE DELETED	FTE VACANT	FTE DISPLACED
Review provision of School Crossing Patrols	207	57	10.42	2.71	0	2.71
Review of Highways & Engineering	5,525	1,001	143.77	15	3	12
Review of Libraries, Museums and Archives.	3,762	430	91.6	10	6.44	3.56
Review of Neighbourhood Services	4,914	132	126.53	14	10	4
Review of Regulatory Services, Licensing and Enforcement Services	1,813	60	45	2	0	2
Review of properties and Land held by the council in line with the Strategic Asset Management Plan (SAMP)	-1,210	400	6	1	0	1
Review of Housing services	1,255	420	61.11	10	0	10
Review of the Business Development team	365	55	8	1	1	0
Review of Planning Enforcement	-26	38	3	1	1	0
Review of all Leisure concessions	1,714	311	0	0	0	0
Change the funding arrangement for staff working on Regeneration Capital Programmes	438	230	0	0	0	0
Increase all fees and charges by an additional 6% above inflation	-14,872	700	0	0	0	0
Review of all commercial leases to reduce/remove peppercorn agreements	-1,210	214	0	0	0	0
Selective price increases such as raising the school meal price to £2.20, review Trade Waste fee structure, increase on-street parking by 20%	-2,163	550	0	0	0	0
Increase the budgeted income to reflect the actual income for services such as Planning, Heaton Fold etc.	-2,486	270	0	0	0	0
Review of Fleet Management	240	240	20.75	1	1	0
Waste, Neighbourhood services amalgamation	12,361	1,393	45.34	TBC	TBC	TBC
Review of Building Control	134	80	7	2	2	0
<b>Total Savings Options for Directorate of Place</b>		<b>6,581</b>	<b>568.52</b>	<b>59.71</b>	<b>24.44</b>	<b>35.27</b>

**THE FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS ACCOUNT**

	2020/21 Original £'000s	2021/22 Original £'000s
Corporate Financing Costs	12,418	14,909
Transferred Debt	1,507	1,507
Interest and Contributions	-750	-145
Airport Dividend	-3,600	0
Airport Rents	-414	-414
Airport Loan Interest	-1,076	-1,076
Debt Management	20	20
Total Financing and Investing	8,105	14,801
Levies	39,859	39,860
Former Employee Pensions	852	852
Car Parks	-350	-350
Miscellaneous	484	679
Apprenticeship Ley	500	500
Other	1275	3572
Sub-total	2761	5253
Financing		
Use of Reserves	-6,185	0
Low Tier Grant	0	-434
LTCS Support Grant	0	-3,203
New Homes Bonus	-505	-416
Total Miscellaneous	-6,690	-4,053
Total	44,035	55,861

**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:-

	<b>£m</b>
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
Equal Pay (if we did not hold Reserves we would have to capitalise these costs – if Government agree)	0.5
Corporate contingencies – Energy etc. (would need a specific Contingency provision)	0.5
Service contingencies (would need a specific contingency provision)	1.0
	<hr/> <u>6.0</u>

**GENERAL FUND BALANCES**

<b>Report to:</b>	Cabinet		
<b>Date of meeting:</b>	8 <sup>th</sup> February 2021		
<b>Report of:</b>	Deputy Chief Executive	<b>Report number:</b>	3674
<b>Contact officer:</b>	Sue Johnson	<b>Telephone number</b>	X1502
<b>Report title:</b>	General Fund Balances 2021/22		
<b>Not confidential</b>			
This report does not contain information which warrants its consideration in the absence of the press or members of the public.			
<b>Purpose:</b>	To outline the Deputy Chief Executive' advice on the Financial Risks facing the Council and the appropriate level of Balances to be maintained		
<b>Recommendations:</b>	That the minimum level of Balances for 2021/22 should be £10.0m or higher if possible.		
<b>Decision:</b>			
<b>Background documents:</b>			
<b>Signed:</b>	Leader/Executive Cabinet Member	Monitoring Officer	
<b>Date:</b>			
<b>Consultation with other officers</b>			
Finance	Yes	Sue Johnson	
Legal	No		
HR	O		
Equality Impact Assessment required?	No		
<b>(a) Pre-consultation reports</b> Is there a need to consult on the proposals?		No	
<b>(b) Post consultation reports</b> Please confirm that the consultation response has been taken into consideration in making the recommendations.		No	
<b>Vision outcomes</b> 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	

## **21 INTRODUCTION**

- 21.1 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.
- 21.2 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).

## **22 NEED FOR GENERAL BALANCES**

- 22.1 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.
- 22.2 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.
- 22.3 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.

## **23 MINIMUM LEVEL OF RESERVES**

- 23.1 Authorities should maintain Balances equivalent to 3% of their Budget, for 2021/22 this would amount to approximately £13.0m. However, whilst this is recommended guidance, the decision on the appropriate level of Balances is one for the Council, with advice from the Deputy Chief Executive, to determine. There are several factors/financial risks that need to be taken into account in considering what is a prudent level of Balances:
- 23.2 Revenue Contingencies
- 23.2.1 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.
- 23.3 Interest

- 23.3.1 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 2020/21 as a result of the Bank of England's reaction to the Covid-19 pandemic, rates have been cut further. For some of the overnight money market funds we use these are now placed at 0% rate of interest.
- 23.4 Capital
- 23.4.1 The Council's capital programme including the Town Hall Strategy is in the order of £180m per annum. 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 may be difficulties in generating a level of capital receipts contribution to fund the capital programme.
- 23.5 Economic Climate
- 23.5.1 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. Both 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. With regard to Brexit, whilst the UK has left the EU there is no direct effect in terms of grants received, but there continues to be considerable uncertainty around the impact on Local Government which it is not possible to quantify at this stage.
- 23.6 Covid-19
- 23.6.1 The pandemic has placed considerable financial pressures on the council. Whilst these have been negated by the provision of government funding, including an additional Tranche 5 payment in 21/22, there is clearly considerable uncertainty about future funding
- 23.7 Council Tax Support Scheme
- 23.7.1 From 1<sup>st</sup> 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
- 23.8 Local Business Rates
- 23.8.1 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.
- 23.8.2 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 council's 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.

- 23.8.3 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.
- 23.8.4 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 2020/21 Bolton Council's share of the provision set aside and charged against revenue is estimated at £4.8m, with a figure projected for 2021/22 of £6.9m. 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 £8.7m before safety net is triggered) – the Council may potentially have to cover losses up to this amount from its General Balances. It should be noted that the government has also introduced a scheme to compensate councils for irrecoverable Collection Fund losses in 2020/21 and whilst we do not know how this will operate it will make it more difficult for councils to trigger safety net.
- 23.9 Un-predictable Demand Led Expenditure
- 23.9.1 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.
- 23.10 Emergencies
- 23.10.1 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%.
- 23.11 Unexpected Demands
- 23.11.1 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.
- 23.12 Service Deficits
- 23.12.1 Balances are also required to offset any Budget deficits carried forward or generated during the year by services as allowed under Financial Regulations.
- 23.13 General Risks
- 23.13.1 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 Deputy Chief Executive 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
- 23.14 These have been taken into account in the overall evaluation of the minimum level of Balances to maintain.

## **24 REVIEW OF 2021/22 BALANCES POSITION**

- 24.1 The last quarterly report estimated available Balances at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2020 at £10.7m. Covid-19 costs are largely bring funded by central government so allowing for this the review of the last 12 months does not suggest that there are any additional factors to take into account in 2021/22, other than those referred to in this note. It is difficult to predict whether the economic climate particularly following BREXIT and the Covid-19 pandemic 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 2021/22.

## **25 DEPUTY CHIEF EXECUTIVE ADVICE ON THE MINIMUM LEVEL OF BALANCES**

- 25.1 Section 25 of the Local Government Act 2003 requires the Section 151 Officer (Deputy Chief Executive) 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".
- 25.2 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 £13m above, Balances of up to £18m would not be regarded as inappropriate.
- 25.3 At this point in time, bearing in mind the above and the size of the Council's Budget at approximately £435m, 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).

## **26 USE OF BALANCES**

- 26.1 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.

## **27 SUMMARY**

- 27.1 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 Deputy Chief Executive'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	2020/21	2021/22	Increase
	%			
Band A	44.14	£1,210.28	£1,255.35	3.72%
Band B	18.74	£1,412.00	£1,464.58	3.72%
Band C	17.10	£1,613.71	£1,673.80	3.72%
Band D	10.11	£1,815.43	£1,883.04	3.72%
Band E	5.54	£2,218.85	£2,301.48	3.72%
Band F	2.26	£2,622.30	£2,719.95	3.72%
Band G	1.87	£3,025.71	£3,138.39	3.72%
Band H	0.23	£3,630.85	£3,766.08	3.72%

The Mayoral Police and Crime Commissioner Precept in percentage terms equates to a 4.8% increase

The Mayoral General Precept (including Fire Services) is a 0% change

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

<b>Band A</b>	Basic Council Tax	Adult Social Care Precept	Total	% Increase
2020/21 Council Tax Base (excl Precepts)	£919.37		£919.37	
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	
2020/21 Council Tax Base	£919.37	£91.41	£1,010.78	
General Levy 2021/22	£13.14		£13.14	1.30%
Adult Social Care Precept Levy 2021/22		£25.27	£25.27	2.50%
Total 2021/22 (excluding Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) Precepts)	£932.51	£116.68	£1,049.19	
GMCA Precepts				
Mayoral Police and Crime Commissioner Precept			£145.53	
Mayoral General Precept (including Fire Services)			£60.63	
<b>Total Charge 2021/22</b>	<b>£932.51</b>	<b>£116.68</b>	<b>£1,255.35</b>	
	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)**

<b>Band D</b>	Basic Council Tax	Adult Social Care Precept	Total	% Increase
2020/21 Council Tax Base (excl Precepts)	£1,379.06		£1,379.06	
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	
2020/21 Council Tax Base	£1,379.06	£137.12	£1,516.18	1.30%
General Levy 2021/22	£19.71	£37.90	£37.90	2.50%
Adult Social Care Precept Levy 2021/22				
	£1,398.77	£175.02	£1,573.79	
Authority (GMCA) Precepts				
GMCA Precepts				
Mayoral Police and Crime Commissioner Precept			£218.30	
Mayoral General Precept (including Fire Services)			£90.95	
<b>Total Charge 2021/22</b>	<b>£1,398.77</b>	<b>£175.02</b>	<b>£1,883.04</b>	
	This will appear as an item on the Council Tax bill	This will appear as an item on the Council Tax bill		

**DRAFT SUBSTANTIVE COUNCIL TAX RESOLUTION**

- (i) That the following recommendations of the Cabinet on 8<sup>th</sup> February 2021 be approved:-
- (a) The Council be recommended to approve the Budget for 2021/22
  - (b) That the council tax for 2021/22 be increased by 3.8% comprising
    - The Adult Social Care Precept at 2.5%
    - The general levy at 1.3%
  - (c) The Council be recommended to approve the Capital Programme and Strategy for 2021/22
  - (d) The Council be recommended to approve the Investment and Prudential Indicators and Treasury Strategies 2021/22 to 2023/24
- (ii) It be noted that on 11<sup>th</sup> January 2021 the Cabinet calculated
- (a) the Council Tax Base 2021/22 for the whole Council area as 76,281 (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	1,982	Band D equivalent
The Parish of Horwich	7,518	Band D equivalent
The Parish of Westhoughton	8,610	Band D Equivalent

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 2021/22 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 2021/22 (excluding Parish precepts) is £120,050,560
- (iv) That the following amounts be calculated for the year 2021/22 in accordance with Sections 31 to 36 of the Act.
- (a) £237,319,396 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) £116,842,835 being the aggregate of the amounts which the Council estimates for the items set out in Section 31A(3) of the Act.
  - (c) £120,476,561 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) £1,579.37 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) £426,001.00 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 £71,847  
 Horwich £204,559  
 Westhoughton £149,595
- (f) £1,573.79 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 £1,610.04  
 Parish of Horwich £1,601.00  
 Parish of Westhoughton £1,591.16

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	£1,073.36	£1,067.33	£1,060.77	£1,049.19
B	£1,252.26	£1,245.23	£1,237.58	£1,224.07
C	£1,431.14	£1,423.11	£1,414.36	£1,398.92
D	£1,610.04	£1,601.00	£1,591.16	£1,573.79
E	£1,967.82	£1,956.77	£1,944.74	£1,923.51
F	£2,325.62	£2,312.56	£2,298.35	£2,273.26
G	£2,683.40	£2,668.33	£2,651.93	£2,622.98
H	£3,220.08	£3,202.00	£3,182.32	£3,147.58

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 2021/22 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:-

Valuation Bands	<u>Precepting Authority</u>	
	Mayoral General Precept (including Fire Services)	Mayoral Police and Crime Commissioner Precept
A	£60.63	£145.53
B	£70.73	£169.78
C	£80.84	£194.04
D	£90.95	£218.30
E	£111.16	£266.81
F	£131.37	£315.32
G	£151.58	£363.83
H	£181.90	£436.60

(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 2021/22 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	£1,279.52	£1,273.49	£1,266.93	£1,255.35
B	£1,492.77	£1,485.74	£1,478.09	£1,464.58
C	£1,706.02	£1,697.99	£1,689.24	£1,673.80
D	£1,919.29	£1,910.25	£1,900.41	£1,883.04
E	£2,345.79	£2,334.74	£2,322.71	£2,301.48
F	£2,772.31	£2,759.25	£2,745.04	£2,719.95
G	£3,198.81	£3,183.74	£3,167.34	£3,138.39
H	£3,838.58	£3,820.50	£3,800.82	£3,766.08

(vii) That the Council's basic amount of Council Tax for 2021/22 at an increase of 3.80% is not excessive in accordance with principles approved under Section 52ZB Local Government Finance Act 1992.

(viii) That the Deputy Chief Executive 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 2021/22.

(x) That the Council's current policy in respect of discretionary relief for charitable organisations, as approved by the Cabinet on the 8<sup>th</sup> February 2021, be reaffirmed and that the Deputy Chief Executive 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 1<sup>st</sup> April 2021:  
"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 of the budgets be noted:-

Corporate Cultural and External Issues 11<sup>th</sup> February 2021

**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 balanced budgets in 21/22 and 22/23. 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 coming out of the 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 £190m.
- 2.2 It is proposed that the council will again adopt a two-year budget strategy, albeit that the majority of the savings will need to be delivered within the first year, i.e. 2021/22. The council no longer has sufficient reserves to enable the budget to be balanced in year and to phase in savings reviews.
- 2.3 The revised savings target of £37.2m is based on the following assumptions and considerations:
- Inflation – 2%
  - 3.8% Council Tax increase in 2021/22 (2.5% ringfenced for Adult Social Care)
  - That any changes to the proposed Business Rates Retention Scheme are fiscally neutral.
- 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 2021/22 will require a higher level of cuts.

**3 The Approach to Managing and Mitigating Service Impact**

- 3.1 The scale of the cuts needed in the wake of the past ten years' reductions, and the restrictions on which parts of the council's budgets these can be made from, mean that there are now very limited options available across our services which enable the council to deliver a legal budget for 2021/22.
- 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:
- The council continues 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:

- Centralised and streamlined support services internally, to achieve economies of scale and careful prioritisation of capacity;
- Further digitalisation of council services to realise efficiencies in conjunction with the council's Digital Inclusion Strategy;
- 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 many which impact on the size of the council's workforce (overall it is estimated that at least 245 Full Time Equivalent [FTE] roles could be displaced), reviews of universal and targeted services, and changes to support schemes and concessions. Full details are included in Appendix C.

## **6 Consultation**

- 6.1 Formal consultation on the budget options set out in the report took place between 1<sup>st</sup> December 2020 and 12<sup>th</sup> January 2021, and included:
- Formal consultation with trade unions – information and proposals set out in this report were presented to the joint unions on 23rd November 2020;
  - Views and comments sought from all stakeholders via an online consultation questionnaire. A paper copy was available upon request;
  - Targeted communications/discussions with representatives of the community and voluntary sector and business rates payers, including via Bolton Vision Partners and Greater Manchester Chamber of Commerce;
  - A staff briefing, which took place online and was available to staff using council and personal devices, and which was recorded for staff to view at alternative times/dates if needed, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This was supported by regular communications and updates via email explaining the overall budget position, and access to the report online. Letters to staff without access to a computer. Staff were encouraged to complete the consultation questionnaire to give their views.
  - (Online) meetings 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 proposal, including desired outcome**

- 7.1 The report sets out the strategic context and outline budget for 2021/22 and 2022/23, including options to achieve the anticipated reduction of £37.2m over the two-year budget cycle.

### **b Who are the main stakeholders in relation to the proposal?**

- 7.2 As set out in previous strategic EIAs, the very nature of the services the council provides, and the scale of the 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 two years. In particular:

- Service users/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 customers' 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;
- 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, 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 1,700 jobs since 2009, and a minimum of 245 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, as well as vacancy management.

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

- 7.3 The philosophy set out by the council to deliver its budget is very clear regarding its priorities in relation to protecting the most vulnerable and enabling economic growth. The approach set out in the earlier parts of this EIA seeks to deliver the best outcome 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 before, the council aims to minimise the impact of budget reductions 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 now being faced 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; a potential further reduction of around 245 FTEs. We 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 Referendum limit for 2021/22 will be 1.99% for the general levy with a further 3% being levied for Adult Social Care. Of this 3%, it is possible to defer 1% to 2022/23.
- 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.
- 7.8 The council is increasingly reliant on council tax, which now forms 50% of the overall income stream. Comments received during consultation ranged from those who were happy to pay more to protect services to vulnerable people, as well as universal services, to those who said they were already struggling and would be unable to afford any increases without cutting back on e.g. food or heating.
- 7.9 The 2.5% increase now proposed specifically for Adult Social Care would help protect the most vulnerable customers 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. That said, limiting the impact on the most vulnerable children and young people 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 is 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 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 council tax rises 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 which may otherwise need to be achieved. This is particularly so for the 2.5% Adult Social Care precept.
- 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 the public 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 staffing at the council as well as the effect that reductions in council services would have on the community and voluntary sector.

#### 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 1,700 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 a set 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.

#### Diversity Groups

- 8.10 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.

8.11 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

8.12 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.

8.13 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.

8.14 During consultation feedback was received from a number of organisations representing people with protected characteristics, including faith groups, disability groups, an LGBTQ+ organisation, and a homelessness group representative. The council will continue to work with such representatives and groups as the individual options are brought forward in more detail.

#### 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 reductions in early intervention approaches, which they felt would lead to more families requiring more intensive intervention and support in the medium to longer term. A number cited the impact of the Coronavirus Pandemic, and that those most affected were the already vulnerable and disadvantaged, and they were therefore concerned about service reductions in the face of increased demand, "*we need*

*services for our children post pandemic, to support recovery, such as youth and leisure*". Cuts to school crossing patrols were also flagged as a concern.

- 8.17 As previously, one of the general messages to come from the consultation was the willingness to protect vulnerable young people in our communities.

#### Older People and those who care for Older People

- 8.18 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.
- 8.19 The consultation at this high level has highlighted some potential impacts on older people and their carers. Many cited the impact that reductions or closures of respite and day care services would have on carers of older or vulnerable adults as well as on the service users themselves: *"it is her only support network"*.
- 8.20 Many people talked about the impact of the current pandemic situation on themselves or others as carers, with day care and other services currently closed, and worries that these facilities would be affected longer term by cuts, *"I am a double carer now I feel like I am drowning"*.
- 8.21 Throughout the process it will be essential to ensure that any proposed changes to services are based on a full understanding of need and eligibility, to ensure that Bolton's older people and their families continue to receive appropriate, accessible, and safe care services.
- 8.22 Again, there was a general willingness to support older people, particularly those who are vulnerable and/or disabled amongst consultation respondees.

#### Disability

- 8.23 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.
- 8.24 The consultation has highlighted concerns across both disabled adults and children and young people and their carers about proposed reductions in services, such as respite and day care, as well as universal services such as libraries and leisure; *"she needs this for her mental an [sic] physical health...it also gives some respite which is needed to help cope with her."*
- 8.25 Services provided at Thicketford House were praised by many respondents, and the concern was expressed that these might be reduced or ceased in future: *"my friend who has learning disabilities thrives by having access to places like Thicketford House."* In particular the impact of any cuts on services users' and their carers' mental health was flagged up by numerous respondents.
- 8.26 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

- 8.27 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.
- 8.28 Many comments received during the consultation highlighted the impact that reductions and changes to services could have on those experiencing socio-economic deprivation. *“I’m...on benefits due to [ill] health. I can’t afford council tax unless I cut back on food and heating.”* There were also many comments on the effect that cuts to universal services like leisure or libraries would have on those experiencing deprivation in terms of mental and physical health and wellbeing, crime and safety and environmental issues.
- 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.**
- 8.29 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 two years. 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.
- 8.30 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 Equality Act. However, this strategic EIA recognises 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 range of stakeholders as the council sets a legal budget for the coming two years.

**Budget Proposals 2021-2023: Consultation Response**

**1. Background**

The consultation period ran for six weeks from Tuesday 1<sup>st</sup> December 2020 to Tuesday 12<sup>th</sup> January 2021. The purpose of the consultation was to ascertain the views of residents, staff and other stakeholders on the financial challenges faced by the council over the period 2021-2023 and gain feedback on the proposals outlined to mitigate the challenges faced by the council and its service delivery.

**2. Methodology**

The consultation process was a public consultation, enabling any Bolton resident or stakeholder the opportunity to comment on the budget proposals. A full report was presented to Cabinet on the 30<sup>th</sup> November 2020, outlining details of the proposals. This was also made available to respondents via the council's consultation website, enabling considered responses to be obtained.

To support and engage Bolton Council staff, emails were distributed throughout the consultation period to all staff members with a Bolton Council or personal email address, making them aware of the consultation process, proposals and staff briefings. To ensure inclusivity, letters were distributed to all other staff the week of the 16<sup>th</sup> November and line managers were encouraged to provide support and guidance. Signposting services for support were also highlighted, as well as a digital platform for submitting queries. A digital staff briefing was held on Monday 23<sup>rd</sup> November, providing staff with information on the proposals, broken down by Directorate, the consultation process, and support available.

Emails to share details of the proposals and the consultation were sent to a range of other stakeholders, including elected members, trades unions, Bolton Vision Partner organisations, including Bolton Community and Voluntary Service (CVS), and other strategic partners.

A comprehensive communication plan was also implemented to raise awareness of the budget proposals across the borough. This included the use of social media, briefings to the local press and a request to strategic partners to encourage their members/representees to complete the consultation questionnaire. 'E-View', the council's consultation panel, comprising 671 members, was also engaged.

Participants were surveyed using a questionnaire tool made up of open and closed questions, over a period of six weeks, providing respondents the opportunity to reflect and share their thoughts on the proposals. The questionnaire was made available both digitally and offline, with the questionnaire being accessible on the council's consultation web page, as well as in hard copy format, on request. Bolton's Library Services also provided support to residents requesting hard copies of the questionnaire and telephone interviews were also conducted when requested. Engagement was monitored throughout the period for inclusivity.

\*A copy of the questionnaire used is included at the end of this document.

**3. Comments**

A number of open-ended questions were included in the questionnaire to give respondents the opportunity to comment on how they would be affected by the proposals and suggest mitigation.

- Comments have been categorised where appropriate. Unless otherwise stated, only categories with 10 or more responses are shown.

- Sample quotes are given verbatim

#### **4. Number of respondents**

355 responses were submitted using the online survey (99%)

4 responses were submitted via postal survey (1%)

#### **5. Organisational responses**

Responses were received from representatives of the following organisations:

- Joint response from trade unions – UNISON and GMB Union
- Bolton CVS
- Bolton at Home
- PaSH Partnership (BHA for Equality, George House Trust and LGBT Foundation)
- Winter Hill Insight
- URC's Bolton and Salford Missional Partnership
- Bolton Interfaith Council
- The Churches of Horwich
- Bolton Catholic Musical and Choral Society
- Farnworth Performing Arts Company Limited

Organisational responses have been embedded into the datasets presented, with the exception of the formal responses from the trade unions and Bolton CVS, which are provided at the end of this section.

In summary, the combined response from Unison and GMB Union outlines significant concerns about the impact of the budget proposals on their members employed by Bolton Council. Concerns have also been broken down and addressed at Directorate level in the response.

The Bolton CVS response outlines a number of issues, including:

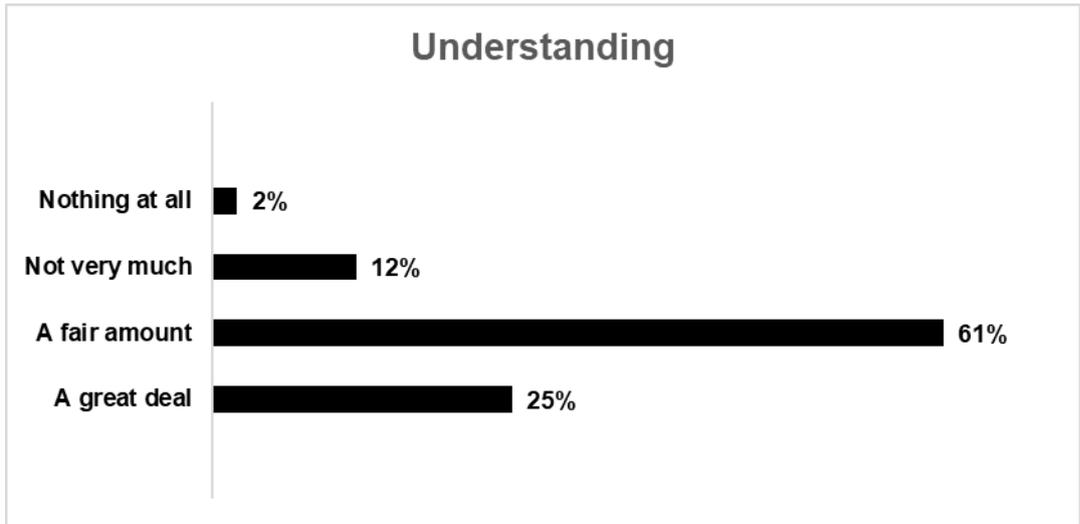
- The impact the reduction of services and staff will have on vulnerable communities and the additional demand this will place on the voluntary and community sector.
- Digital poverty/lack of confidence and the potential loss of face-to-face services.
- The impact on inequalities in the town and recommending that any review should be undertaken in partnership with the sector and using a Community Impact Assessment approach.

Bolton CVS also emphasises the role of strategic partnerships; supporting the cross transfer of knowledge, developing the growth potential of local communities and the business sector, user experience, as well as the financial savings that could be gained.

Issues raised will be picked up within the regular meetings that take place between the council and organisations, in line with our partnership approach.

#### **6. Understanding**

Respondents were encouraged to read the full proposal before submitting comments to the consultation. To gauge whether respondents had inferred the information correctly, individuals were asked to state how well they understood why the council had to make the total savings of £39.5 million in the 2021 -2023 Budget Report. 86% of respondents stated that they had a fair – great amount of understanding of why the council had to make the savings and undertake the budget review. 2% stated they had no understanding.

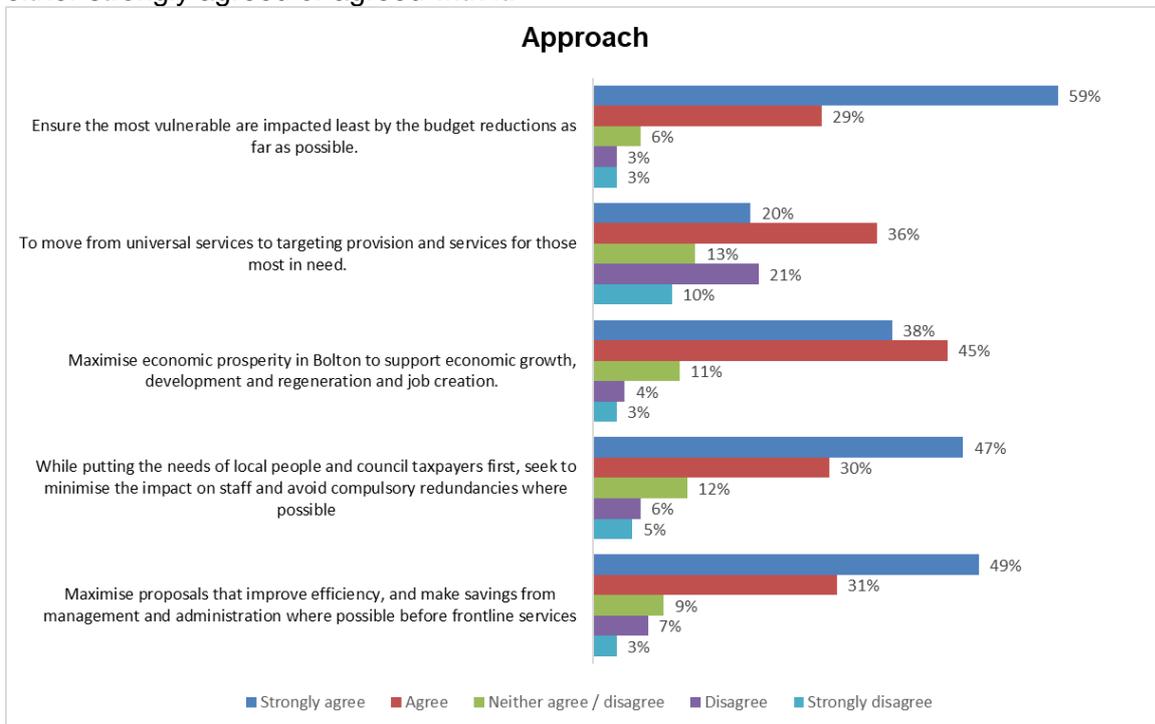


Base:

356

## 7. Approach

The consultation outlined the council's strategy for delivering the 2021-2023 budget. Respondents were asked to rank how strongly they agreed with each of the five statements. 'Ensuring the most vulnerable are impacted least by the budget reductions as far as possible' was the area with strongest agreement, with 88% of respondents stating they strongly agreed/agreed with this statement. The statement which received the least support was 'moving from universal services to targeting provision and services for those most in need'; 31% respondents disagreed/strongly disagreed with this statement, although 56% either strongly agreed or agreed with it.

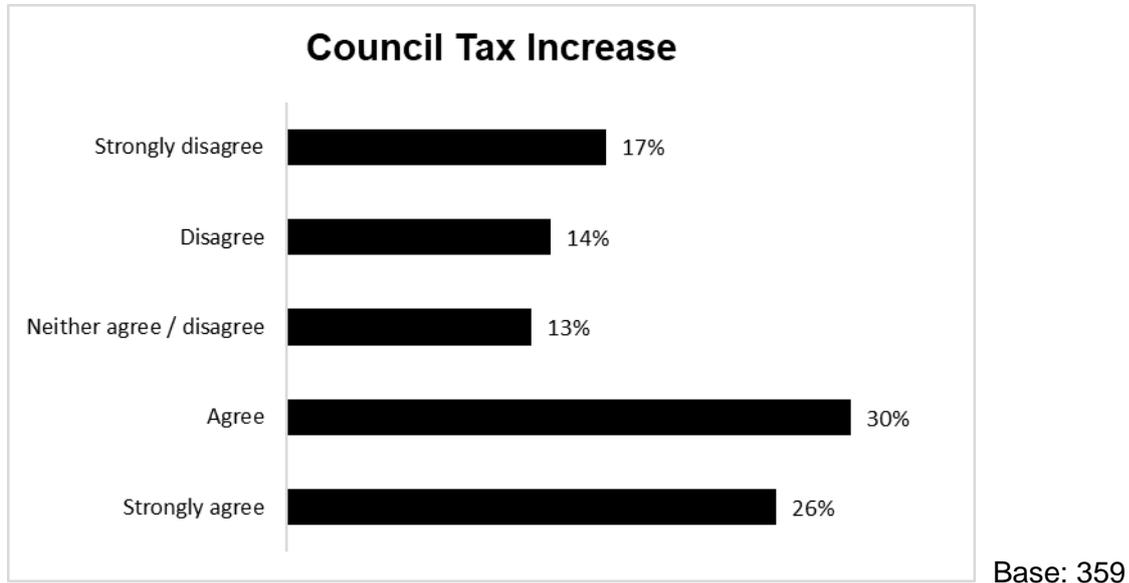


Base average: 355

## 8. Council Tax

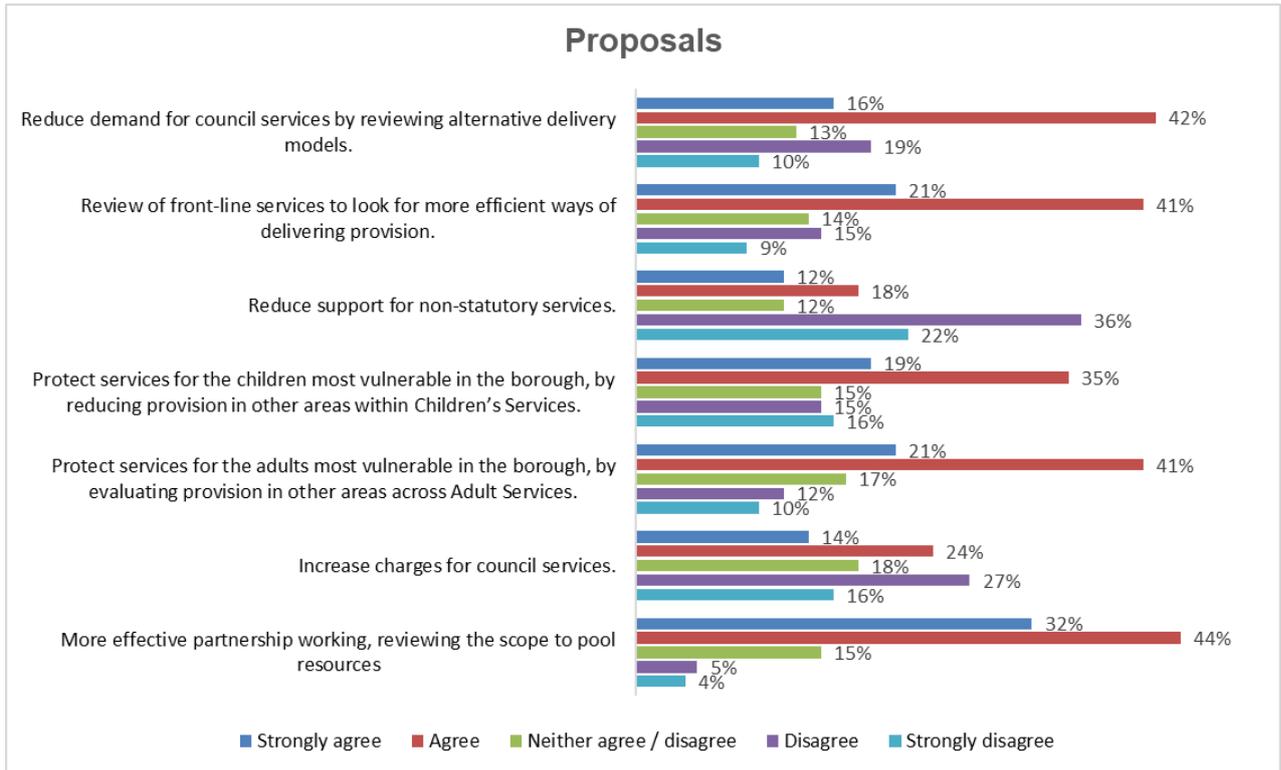
The proposals put forward assumed a 1.99% increase in council tax (subject to approval) and an additional 2% for Adult Social Care (subject to approval). The consultation provided an example of how that would impact a Band A and Band C property, but also outlined that a lower increase would result in further budget cuts having to be made. Respondents were

asked to rank how strongly they agreed or disagreed with that proposal. All respondents to the consultation answered this question, with 56% (202 individuals) stating they strongly agreed/agreed with the increase. Just under one-third (111 individuals) disagreed with the increase, with some outlining their concerns in the section below relating to 'Impact: Increased costs (b)'.



## 9. Proposals

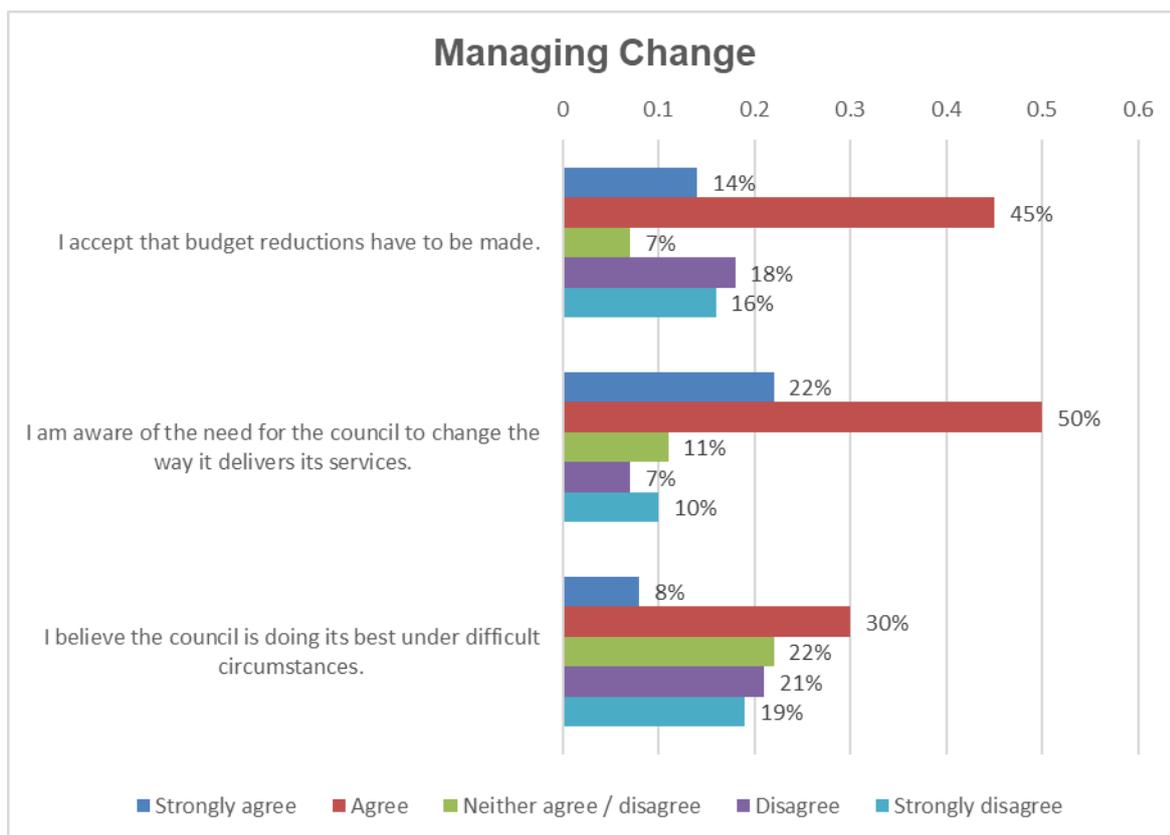
The proposals outlined within the report demonstrate Bolton Council's position in protecting the most vulnerable children and adults in the borough, whilst avoiding further financial impact to directly delivered services. Respondents were asked to reflect on the proposals put forward within the budget report and state how strongly they agreed or disagreed with each. Just over three-quarters of respondents strongly agreed/agreed with the proposal for 'more effective partnership working, reviewing the scope to pool resources.' However, it must also be noted that 62% of respondents also strongly agreed/agreed with the proposals put forward to 'review front-line services, looking for more efficient ways of delivering provision' and to 'evaluate provision in other areas across Adult Services.' Respondents were particularly opposed to the proposal to 'reduce support for non-statutory services', whereby 58% stated they strongly disagreed/disagreed.



Base average: 354

## 10. 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. 68% of respondents accepted that budget reductions have to be made. 72% were aware of the need for the council to change the way it delivers its services. 38% believe the council is doing its best under difficult circumstances.



Base average: 356

## 11. Impact of the proposals

Respondents were asked to describe what impact the proposals would have on them and their households. 287 comments were received. In addition, 52 suggestions were made as to how money could be saved, or cuts avoided. This issue is addressed in the section on 'Alternative Solutions'. 24 respondents said there would be little or no impact on themselves.

The following table outlines the key impacts.

Rank	Q1a Categorised comments	No. of respondents
a)	Reduced services / poor value for money	157
b)	Increased costs	108
c)	Job concerns	80
d)	Impact on young	44
e)	Physical / mental health	40
f)	Impact on people with disabilities	34
g)	Impact on elderly	32
h)	May need to use more services	14
i)	Impact on carers	11
j)	Impact on volunteers / voluntary sector	11
k)	May lose home / have to move	10
l)	Reduced local economy spend	10

### Impact quotes – verbatim extracts

#### a) Reduced services / poor value for money

Respondents expressed concerns about reduced services in general, and to specific services. This category includes 37 specific mentions of services for the 'vulnerable'; 24

comments about cuts to leisure centres; 13 regarding cuts to the Albert Halls; and 11 around environmental issues. Libraries and museums, highways, schools, leisure centres and events were among other services highlighted by respondents that caused significant concern.

- *Seen very little for our council tax...Over the last few years council services have been reduced to almost non-existent.*
- *Pay more but get less every year*
- *We would pay if services were provided adequately.*
- *Council tax constantly seems to rise but most people don't see the benefit of where that money goes. May be this needs to be communicated when the change is announced.*
- *The Albert Halls is one of the most important venues in and around Bolton and would be a great loss to myself and the community.*
- *I would miss very much visits to the Albert Halls for shows. Leisure centres offer affordable facilities for all to use and benefit from.*
- *Will mean less services dirty environment*
- *I no longer feel that the council will be there for me, my family or community at times of need.*
- *Reducing leisure centres, for example, impacts the health of our borough*
- *Rely on the current services and if reduced or taken away then daily life will take a downhill slide.*
- *We are already living with mountains of fly tipping. As soon as it's moved more appears. People have bin bag mountains in their yards, rats can be seen in broad daylight. It's like a third world slum. You have no idea what it's like to live in these conditions.*
- *We dont rely on Bolton Council We are petrified for those that do.*
- *I would be strongly affected if any libraries were to close, as I rely on my local library for reading books and a certain amount of social interaction.*

### **b) Increased costs**

This category includes those who were unhappy about paying more for services, including 50 comments about a rise in Council Tax, and 10 around car park charges.

- *An increase in tax is not the step forward and seems like a quick cash grab.*
- *2020 has been a bad year for everyone, but to expect people to cough up more money to balance the books is wrong.*
- *By increasing parking charges, the town centre (already woeful ) will be decimated.*
- *As a working family we will have to find additional money to pay the increase poll tax. Has my salary increase ??? No*
- *Higher council tax is ridiculous, ...how are people expected to live...most dont even have a job due to "covid" so how do you expect them to pay more for nothing in return, its DISGUSTING!*
- *I struggle to pay my Council tax as it is.*
- *Cost of living is out weighing my pay rises and will be in poverty due to tax hike.*
- *Increase in council tax will impact financially on already stretched finances*
- *Concerned about the high rises in council taxes. I understand that extra money needs to be found but this will greatly affect me financially*
- *Council tax increase quite high*
- *With all the issues surrounding Covid it would be very harsh to increase costs for residents via increasing the Council Tax*

### **c) Job concerns**

The prime concern [62 respondents] in this category was job security and the threat of redundancy, although 17 respondents raised concerns around a pay freeze. Comments were also received about the future pressure and stress around a reduced workforce, and proposed changes to terms and conditions.

- *I work for the council so pay cuts reduction in staffing will affect me.*
- *My job and my partners jobs depends directly on a service which may be cut. There is a chance we could both lose our jobs, and would be unable to pay the mortgage and our bills.*
- *Potential redundancy, my job which generates income for the Council will be deleted.*
- *Myself and my partner both work for Bolton Council...The cuts have made us both have sleepless nights and worry's for the future*
- *I strongly object to the proposal of the 3 day UNPAID closure of the council services over the Christmas period. This is a reduction in salary and essentially it is a pay cut over all grades. It negates any pay increase we have finally been awarded in 2020 - on top of the introduction of a pay freeze for LA employees going forward after years of pay freezes since 2010.*
- *As an employee of the Council who's department is under threat of redundancies, this will greatly impact me and my family if I am made redundant. There will be less income coming into the household thus impacting on our ability to spend within the borough. Also we may not be able to afford the level of Council tax which we currently pay thus reducing income for the Council.*
- *Possibility of my post being put up as a cut. We will also be out of pocket because of a pay freeze and the additional leave to be taken.*

#### **d) Impact on young**

Respondents felt that the proposals would adversely affect young people and children.

- *Children's centre are vital to the community and have already been hit in the last round of cuts. Cuts can be made from other area first.*
- *For vulnerable children, especially SEND, access to universal services is important - targeted provision can create a demand, with an impact on the workforce to have to work out who meets criteria.*
- *I have a vulnerable child and already feel affects of poor funding in this area.*
- *We need services for our children post pandemic, to support recovery, such as youth and leisure*
- *Savings to ... children's services regardless of costs goes against every government and independent report and more should be done to support children having the best start to life.*

#### **e) Physical / mental health**

There were concerns about how reduced services and job losses would affect people's wellbeing.

- *Reduction of services that will affect the health of Bolton folks*
- *The NHS will be under more strain as people's mental and physical health will be poorer.*
- *Staff become more stressed and burn out due to covering the jobs of redundant colleagues - leads to increased sickness. The work also becomes more distressing as we are less able to offer families the support they need.*
- *My current role is under review and therefore leaves me feeling vulnerable.*
- *Working under pressure*

#### **f) Impact on disabled people**

Respondents worried about how the changes would affect those who were disabled or had long term illnesses. Many expressed concerns about potential closures of day centres, such as Thicketford House, and cuts to respite services, and the impact this would have on both those they cared for and themselves.

- *My Mum .. suffers from dementia and it already feels as though the adult social care available to her is somewhat lacking. The social workers and care co-ordinators have*

*been fabulous, but they are clearly overworked and underfunded and there are a lack of options available*

- Our niece is an adult with learning difficulties, and she is not the only vulnerable adult /child that we know. She normally attends Thicketford Centre and absolutely loves being there with her friends and peers...If there is a reduction in these services for her and her peers, their world becomes so much smaller, insular and lacking in the stimulation and interaction that they receive from the amazing staff there.*
- I'm concerned more for my sister. Who is a vulnerable adult. If her services within the learning disability sector get reduced or stopped. This will impact her whole life greatly. You will take away any freedom she can have.*
- I am disabled and on a fixed income, the government has decided to increase my income by 35p PW from april 21. I have no way of increasing my income so any increase in council tax comes from a already limited budget*
- My mum has vascular dementia and Alzheimer's and receives visits from carers four times a day. She currently lives at home and could not manage without the services from adult care.*
- Our daughter ...asks every night going to bed "when is Thicketford back?" We tell her we dont know, but it will be as soon as the virus is under control. These beautiful people, who are the most vulnerable in our society, who have no voice, depend on us to do what is right for them. I beg you not to let them down.*

#### **g) Impact on the elderly**

Concerns were expressed about the proposals in relation to older adults.

- Libraries ...play a significant part in life-long learning and support for families and older people*
- Have elderly parents. We will all be hit.*
- As an older adult, I am concerned that support may not be available to me if I need it in the future.*
- The elderly are already struggling in many ways and this year has had a major impact on them with regards to isolation and loss of some services. Further cuts to services that directly support people... would be of major detriment.*
- Services such as libraries leisure centres are important to retired people like us*
- Many of my elderly friends and some with profound disabilities will suffer. They've already faced cutbacks, medical help, meals on wheels, transport, one to one initiatives.....it can't carry on.*

#### **h) May need to use more services**

Comments were received about the subsequent effect of service reduction, increased costs and reduced income, thus resulting in more people needing to use services or being pushed into the 'vulnerable' category.

- Without early intervention & lower level support more vulnerable people will be at risk of neglect / abuse / not having their needs met. So completely removing support at an early stage in the long-run would be more expensive to the council & health services.*
- This is going to cause more ...families to rely on food banks*
- Removing support at an early stage in the long-run would be more expensive to the council & health services. In reality this would lead to more serious case reviews when vulnerable adults & children are seriously injured & hurt or worse.*
- Those next most vulnerable will be hit most by a reduction in services, resulting in increasing vulnerability for them.*

#### **i) Impact on carers**

Comments were received about the impact on carers, as service users, if there was a reduction in service delivery.

- *My adult cousin and her family rely on the day care services provided for adults with high levels of leaning disability. The impact on the quality of life for the whole family would be negatively impacted if this service was no longer available.*
- *I have a vulnerable adult son with special needs and learning disabilities, ...Myself and his dad are now approaching our late 60s and have health problems and not had any respite for nearly two years*
- *Our daughter who has severe learning disabilities has attended day care provision in Bolton since she left school...We feel, as carers, that our daughter is safe, happy and well looked after. This is imperative for our mental health as carers, and the fact that we are getting older.*
- *I have a disabled son who is 42 yrs old and husband who has dementia my son has not been out of the house since march and every single day has asked me when Thicketford road day centre is reopening ...i am a double carer now i feel like i am drowning.*

#### **j) Impact on volunteers / voluntary sector**

Some respondents were concerned that the proposed cuts to service provision could result in more people turning to the voluntary sector to provide additional support.

- *Increased reliance on food banks, voluntary groups, faith groups and community. These three cannot, in any way, manage to plug the gaps created by proposed cuts.*
- *Reduction in funding for community and voluntary sector bodies would be regrettable, although understandable*
- *Albert Halls - hopefully this would still be available at reasonable cost to local dramatic and musical societies.*

#### **k): May lose home / have to move**

In some cases respondents noted the severe, financial effects the proposals may have on living conditions.

- *At risk of losing our jobs and home again in at a time of financial crisis.*
- *Will be moving out of the Bolton area*
- *My current mortgage would be unsustainable without my income*

#### **l): Reduced local economy spend**

Responses remarked upon the impact to the local economy, noting that if residents had to pay more for services or suffer a reduction in income, they would have less to spend in the local economy.

- *Less money to spend on the local economy. Yet more businesses will disappear with a further reduction in business rates income for the council.*
- *Less income coming into the household thus impacting on our ability to spend within the borough.*

Respondents also stated that:

- They understood the need for cuts and changes.
- Made comment on the consultation process.
- Offered to contribute more.
- Felt that cost increases penalised those who worked or had savings.
- Worried that cuts would lead to a rise in anti-social behaviour and crime.
- Worried about increased digitalisation.
- "They would be affected."

## **12. Alternative solutions**

Respondents were asked whether they could offer any alternative solutions to the savings proposals, whilst still delivering statutory services. 275 comments were received. Outlined below are the main alternatives.

Rank	Q7 Categorised comments	No. of respondents
a)	Reduce staff costs / improve efficiency	89
b)	Increase revenue / use reserves	82
c)	Review / improve management / leadership	78
d)	Sell / rent buildings / other assets	42
e)	Efficiency savings with partners / voluntary sector	42
f)	Pro-active spending / savings	36
g)	Reduce services	35
h)	Greater digitalisation / reduce correspondence	23
i)	Operate more services in-house / review contracts	21
j)	Curtail projects / events	18
k)	Environmental improvements	16
l)	Further ideas for staff review	11

### **a) Reduce staff costs / improve efficiency**

Respondents felt that savings could be made in staff costs, such as reducing the number of officers and Councillors (see also c below). 20 respondents felt that savings could be made by allowing staff to continue to work from home; 13 felt that fewer agency staff or consultants should be employed; while 10 suggested using volunteers. However, it should be noted that some respondents also reflected upon the significant contribution staff have made throughout the pandemic and their role in supporting communities. Other alternative efficiency saving measures were raised through the reduction of resources, for example reducing print-based material, where possible.

- *As a result of Covid, the way we work has changed immensely and we have proved that we can work effectively, in fact more effectively, working from home.*
- *Restructure of services to merge services and reduce staffing levels. More home working and use of technology to enable reduction in office provision which would reduce overheads.*
- *Bin men to empty street bins as well instead of heading home at 13.00hrs daily*
- *Review the expenditure on agency workers and on 'interim' staff and consultants.*
- *Agency costs are a massive hit on what the council pays out on a monthly basis. Expenses is another.*
- *Many different teams within the whole of the Council, and within the different Directorates, whose staff are responsible for very similar tasks. Teams could be streamlined*
- *There are staff sat at home since lockdown who are being paid there full salary to do nothing because they don't have the resources to work from home and because there job is not something that can be done from home. Did the council not use the furlough scheme? should the salary of these staff not be reviewed when we are having to make so many cuts.*
- *Reduce the number of Councillors, look at working with other councils for buying goods to spread costs and getting a better deal, charge for some services not already being charged for.*
- *Give full time staff 90 days notice, make them reapply for there posts, then find who is most suitable health wise. Too many staff in the town hall, what do they all do?*

### **b) Increase revenue / use reserves**

Many ways of increasing revenue were suggested. 40 respondents felt that funding should be provided by Central Government; 17 that Council Tax or other taxes should be increased, particularly for the wealthiest or those in larger houses; while 10 thought that service charges could be increased further. Other suggestions included using reserves or borrowing more.

- *Local government finance clearly needs sorting out at a national level to give local authorities more control over their resources / revenue... I trust that the council's leaders are making their voices heard nationally. Central Government regularly tells us that austerity is over - it clearly is not! The level of cuts still being demanded in these difficult times are unconscionable.*
- *Local Tories stand up to the Tory government*
- *Be more vocal in criticising the cuts in funding from central government that are leading to this*
- *If the council paid more attention to collecting monies owed to it, as opposed to writing amounts off for unpaid Council Tax, then this in turn would lead to less services having to be cut and those of us who do pay having to unfairly make up the shortfall.*
- *Put up the Council tax on the higher value properties.*
- *Increase council tax more than the proposed 1.9%. if we want these services we need to pay for them..if we are still being paid we are fortunate and can afford it.*
- *Demand appropriate levels of funding from government. Introduce local wealth tax.*
- *You have over £200 million in reserves. Reserves are there for emergencies, a pandemic is an emergency. Using just £7 millions last year is pathetic.*
- *Charge more for entry into leisure centres etc, raise council tax.*

### **c) Review / improve management / leadership**

Respondents thought that improvements and savings could be made by improved leadership and cutting the number of posts and expenses. 30 respondents specified savings around Elected Members / Mayor.

- *All directors should take a pay cut of the 1.95 you are proposing for the Council Tax increase.*
- *Pay cuts for those on more than £100,000.*
- *Middle/upper management staffing levels are too high and the salaries too big in comparison to the (greatly undervalued) staff who actually deliver the services and where most of the cuts are always made*
- *Review senior management structures - review was supposed to happen and never did*
- *How about not paying out packages for highly paid officers. Cut the councillors to two per ward. Stop the Mayoral civic duties*
- *Reduce management roles by better delegation to staff.*
- *Allow managers to manage and allow AD's Directors to do their job*
- *Review senior team, and consider pay rise levels that you award to your executive board. Anything greater than 1-2% adds insult to the public who in their roles can expect less than this in every case. Cut the councillors expenses, they are at a astounding amount on top of there wage*
- *Abolish mayors luxury car... Reduce number of councillors from 60 to 40.*

### **d) Sell / rent buildings / other assets**

Saving suggestions were put forward in the form of selling off under-utilised buildings or renting them in part or whole.

- *Selling buildings currently owned by the Council that are not used or not being used to full capacity.*
- *There are pockets of land all over the Borough that are owned and maintained by the LA - these could be sold as could some under-used buildings that are owned by the LA. During the pandemic, we staff have had to work from home - many services seemed unable to do so prior to the pandemic, but, this year has shown it is entirely possible - there is proof that less office space is required.*
- *Look at council buildings that aren't being used but are still costing the council money*
- *Sell off unused or vacant buildings*

- *Renting buildings to the private sector to be used as office space Converting Council owned town centre buildings to apartments and generate an income from rent Look at how the Council can develop land they own for building to be used to generate an annual income*

#### **e) Efficiency savings with partners / voluntary sector**

Respondents suggested partnership working with other authorities and the private and voluntary sector as a cost-effective way of delivering services.

- *Involve voluntary organisations in keeping local areas litter free.*
- *Look at shared services with neighbouring councils.*
- *Pool your resources. Eg children's centres and school working together to find vulnerable children and give the assistance they need to each other. Same with hospitals and homeless shelters, the amount of people on the street that go to the hospital just got a bed a meal are put strains in the services work with charities to combat this.*
- *Some services may lend themselves to being delivered jointly with other Boroughs locally? Some may be best done by others who may need less overhead to deliver them? More use of volunteers in running community facilities or environmental activity*
- *Give more support to charities and local organisations who can deliver services more cost effectively*

#### **f) Pro-active spending / savings**

Ideas were proposed, such as spending more now to make long-term savings. Using finances to lower costs was also suggested, thus attracting the private sector and visitors, resulting in increased revenue overall.

- *Investment in buildings that can cater for events and weddings in outskirts of town centre. Increased package for voluntary redundancy or attractive early retirement packages for staff may work out better in long run.*
- *Develop the town's parks (Moses Gate, Moss Bank Park, Cutacre Country Park, Jumbles, Central Park) into community attractions. Look at Heigh Hall in Wigan, good size park, wide selection of local businesses paying rates, affordable parking, other attractions like hotel, crazy golf and woodland trails. Benefits include community wellbeing, profitable businesses, increase in council income.*
- *Business rates need to be radically reduced to allow small businesses & new start ups to use the properties which lie empty*
- *Paying out for jobs to done more than once because the job was not done right in the first place. Money could be saved by also sending out the right person to do job and having with them what they need.*
- *Repair roads properly instead of botching them cheaply, they will last longer and cost less if they are maintained properly,*

#### **g) Reduce services**

Although the proposals included cutting services, respondents felt that they could be reduced even further, or that cuts should instead be made to services which they did not value. 12 respondents felt that services could be privatised. Other suggestions included further cuts to Libraries & Museums, and to the Albert Halls.

- *Close the Albert Halls business*
- *There is no need for libraries to open on Sundays.*
- *Stop taking in asylum seekers*
- *Close Smithills Hall and Hall ith Wood, stop throwing money at ethnic minorities.*
- *Could the bins not be privatised, like Meals on Wheels, this would save money that could be moved into vital services*
- *Reduce collection frequency of beige and purple bins - ours are rarely full.*
- *Stop doing things you are not obliged to do.*

- *Reduce the days the one stop shop offers face to face service*

#### **h) Greater digitalisation / reduce correspondence**

Respondents agreed that more services could be offered online, suggesting savings could be made by sending correspondence electronically instead of through the post, thus also reducing duplication.

- *Start small with simple things like email of wage slips and documents*
- *Digital approach more, we must spend a lot on postage/stationery, so target more email delivery e.g. bills, payslips, letters*
- *Improve the website so that all services can be accessed especially for payments such as bin orders and bulky waste collections.*
- *Using paperless resources e.g. Not posting paper adverts/brochures and instead emailing them*

#### **i) Operate more services in-house / review contracts**

Proposals also suggested that services could be offered by the council rather than contracted out. Respondents suggested that contracts with the private or voluntary sector should be reviewed to ensure that they offered value for money.

- *Review contracts with service providers to building eg PAT testing, boiler maintenance, sanitary service etc as some companies are charging a large amount for the services*
- *Albert Halls needs to be turned into a thriving event space - we are a university town but don't capitalise on this - bands would love to use the space - why are the Events team not involved? We get panto and the female version of Chubby Brown - really shortsighted. It should be being used for events for all the different cultural groups, art exhibitions, and so on.*
- *Albert Halls why not make it fully in house. Bring back the box office. Run the bar/restaurant ourselves.*
- *Do more in-house repairs to council buildings. Why pay a company a call out charge to change a lightbulb!!*

#### **j) Curtail projects / events**

There was a sense that some activities the council undertake were not part of its remit or were not essential. These include ownership of Crompton Place Shopping Centre, redevelopment plans and events.

- *Council's should be concerned with providing leisure centres not shopping centres.*
- *Stop spending money on none essential things, Christmas light switch on, fireworks and "celebrities" turning them on.*
- *You are planning on spending millions on the town centre, think carefully about the priorities, do we need another hotel etc.*
- *Cut cost on making unnecessary cycling lanes and making roads narrow causing havoc and additional traffic.*

#### **k) Environmental improvements**

Respondents suggested improvements which could be made, that would not only benefit the environment, but save the council money.

- *Reintroduce larger general refuse bins to reduce fly tipping and it's associated costs.*
- *Make sure that Council buildings have LED lighting*
- *Stop mowing grass verges. Better for environment.*
- *Educate people to clean up their own mess*

#### **l) Further ideas for staff review**

Respondents made a number of suggestions around the staff review

- *Do a Council wide offer of voluntary redundancy / retirement, not just those who are yet again being reviewed. Review all services, not just the same teams every time*

*there a review. Review senior management - and don't then replace them 6 months later.*

- *Voluntary redundancies so the people who want to go can and those that would love and need to keep jobs can as there will be more opportunities for them too redeploy*
- *Increased package for voluntary redundancy or attractive early retirement packages for staff may work out better in long run.*
- *Offer all staff the option to purchase holidays/ if that's already in place then increase the maximum amount of holidays which are able to be purchased*

Additionally, services to children and the 'vulnerable' was mentioned by 12 respondents, and 11 respondents respectively. Other comments and suggestions were also received within the consultation: copying good practice elsewhere; reviewing funding to the voluntary and private sector; and regarding services targeting those from ethnic minority backgrounds. The impact of cuts on those who were disabled, in poor health, or elderly was also of concern to a number of respondents, who highlighted the challenges that would be faced if there was a reduction of services or site closures, with particular reference to the Thicketford Centre.

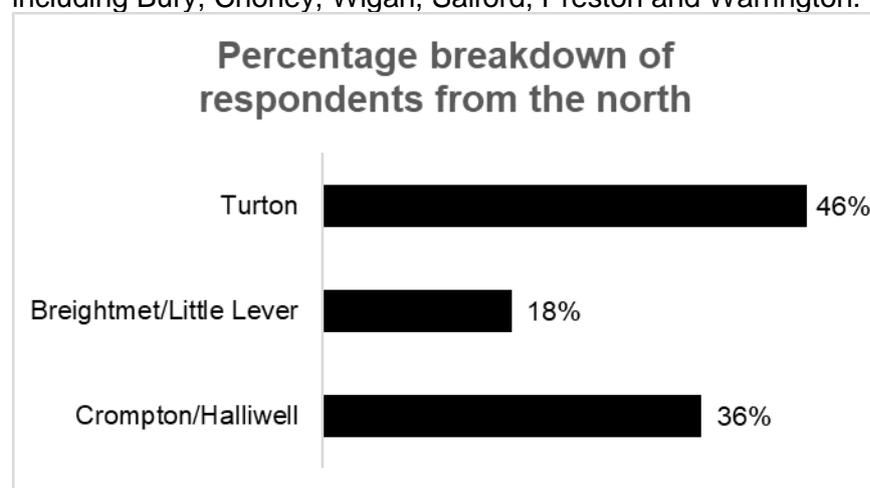
### **13. Respondent demographic**

So that we can understand how the proposals impact on different people, respondents were asked to answer a number of questions about their personal circumstances. Of the 359 responses, 217 were completed by residents, 106 by staff members, 5 from interested partner organisations, 16 from community/voluntary groups, 1 from a local business, and 9 that stated 'other'. Examples of the sectors that contributed to the consultation include:

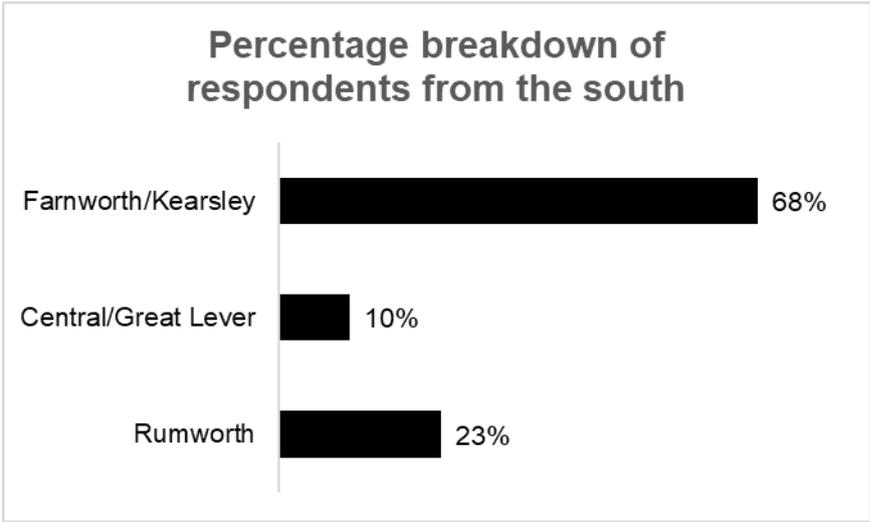
- An Early Years provider
- Adult Care Services Day Centre
- Advocate for mental health
- Representative from an organisation based in Bury that supports homeless and vulnerable adult service users from Bolton
- Individuals supporting the interests of residents with learning difficulties
- A group supporting older people

### **Location of respondents**

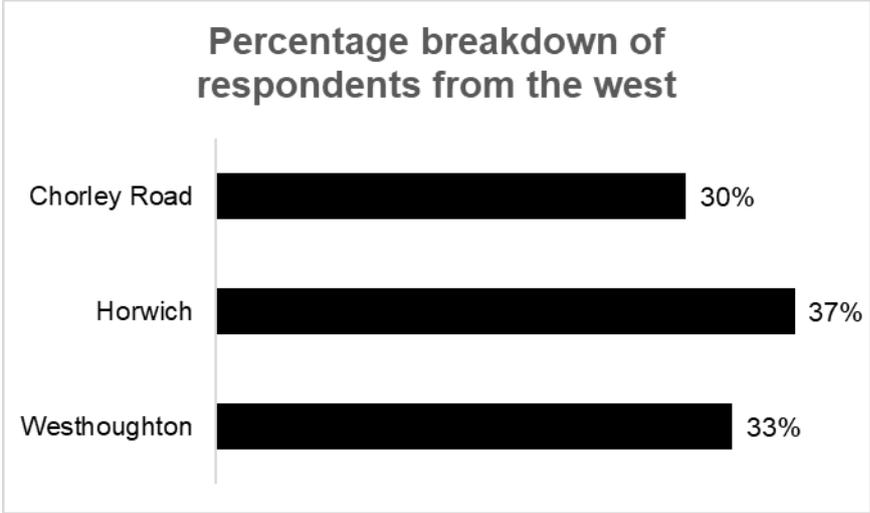
The tables below show the demographics of respondents by geographical neighbourhoods, broken down into districts. A total of 182 respondents provided their full postcode; 37% of respondents were from the north, 17% were from the south and 37% were from the west of the borough. The remaining 9% of respondents were residents outside of Bolton, from towns including Bury, Chorley, Wigan, Salford, Preston and Warrington.



Base: 67



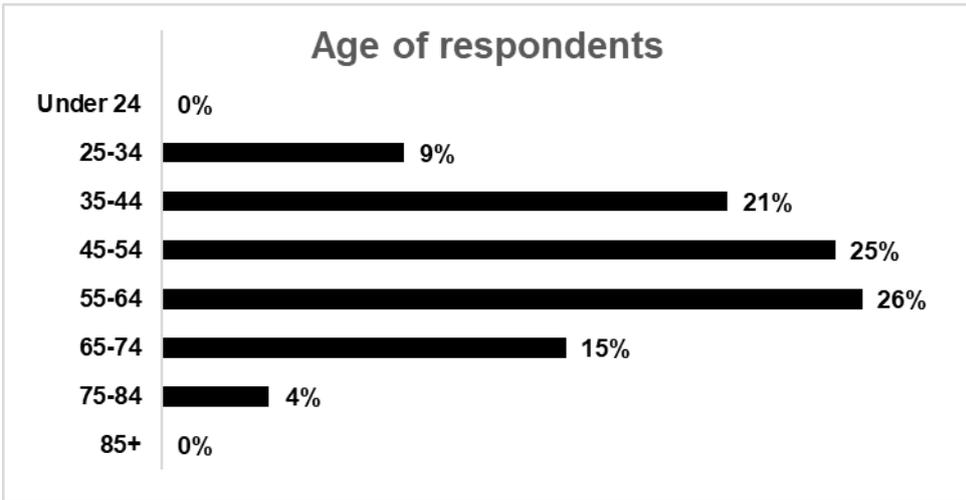
Base: 31



Base 67

**Age**

81% (259) of respondents to the survey were between the age of 25 and 64. The remaining 19% were responses from individuals above the age of 65.



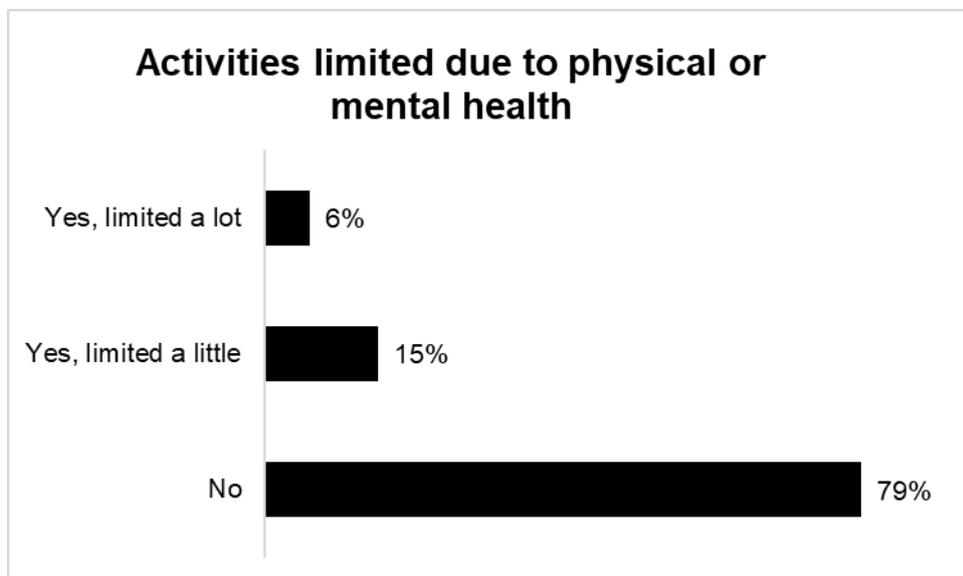
Base: 321

**Gender**

56% of respondents are female, 42% are male 2% reported as 'other'.

### Physical or mental health challenges

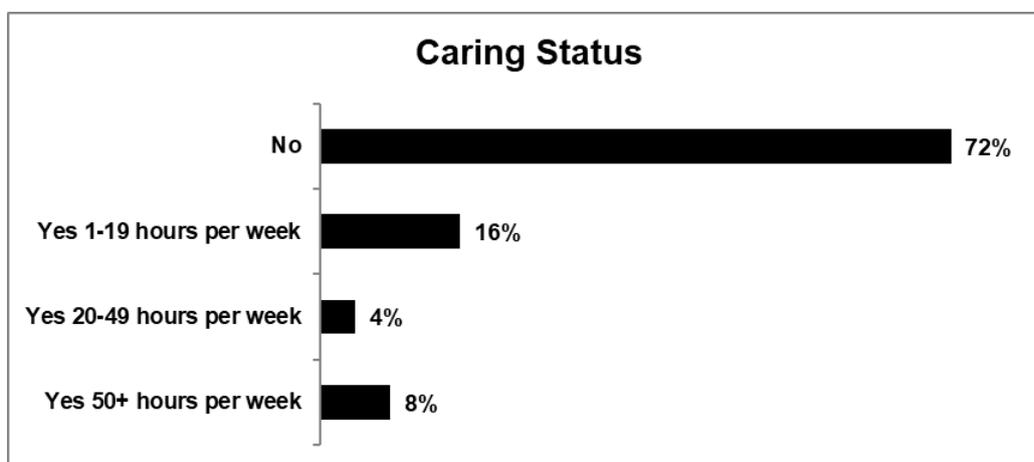
Residents were asked if their day-to-day activities were limited because of a health problem or disability which has lasted, or is expected to last, at least 12 months. Over one-fifth of respondents stated their day-to-day activities were limited due to a health problem or disability.



Base: 324

### Caring Status

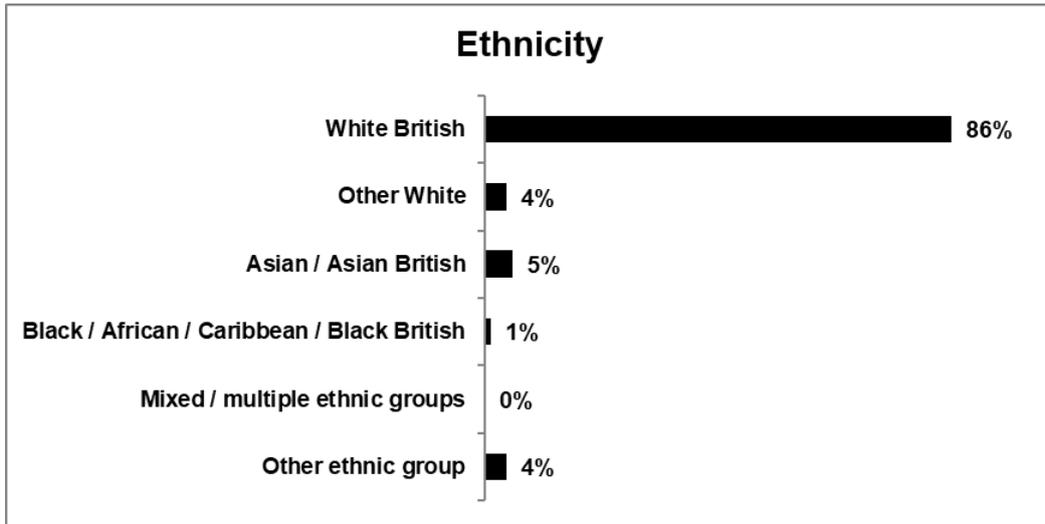
Residents were asked if they looked after, or gave help or support to family members, friends, neighbours or others because of a long-term physical or mental health disability or problems due to old age. Over one-quarter of respondents had caring responsibilities.



Base: 323

### Ethnicity

Residents were asked to state their ethnic group. 14% of all respondents stated their ethnicity as other than White British.



Base: 196

### Consultation Questionnaire - Sample

## Budget consultation 2021-2023: have your say

**We are seeking your views on the financial challenge Bolton Council faces during the coming years.**

The council is facing a serious reduction in its budget as a result of reduced funding from central government and the COVID-19 pandemic. The vast majority of the council's funding comes from council tax and business rates, however COVID-19 has meant that less businesses are able to pay business rates and more people are claiming a council tax discount because their income has fallen, leaving us with a gap. We are also seeing an increase in demand for services and greater costs, particularly across children's and adults' social care and homelessness; the pandemic has also led to a reduction in the income that we are able to bring in from a range of sources, which help to balance the budget.

The level of cuts we need to make as a proportion of the whole budget is significant and follows ten years of austerity measures, which have already had wide-ranging impacts. The cost of providing adults' and children's services, including those for our most vulnerable residents, makes up 63% of our budget. In providing all our services, staff costs form 37%, meaning that choices about where we make the cuts are very difficult.

The total budget requirement (excluding schools and levies) is £206 million, as a result the report put forward to Cabinet recommends that the council will have to find savings of £39.5 million.

Given the financial challenge facing the council it is important that residents and stakeholders express their views to help guide and shape decisions. The consultation period will run for six weeks from the 1st December 2020.

Please visit [www.bolton.gov.uk/directory-record/1993/budget-consultation-2021-2023](http://www.bolton.gov.uk/directory-record/1993/budget-consultation-2021-2023) to read the full proposals before completing this questionnaire. We need to receive it by midday on 12th January 2021 for your views to count.

## Your responses

Responses from individuals will be grouped together in any report and anonymised so that you cannot be identified.

Any personal data you provide will be held securely in line with our retention schedule and privacy policy, which can be found at [www.bolton.gov.uk/data-protection-freedom-information](http://www.bolton.gov.uk/data-protection-freedom-information)

## Your understanding

**Q1 How much do you now feel you understand about why the council must make total savings of £39.5 million in the 2021-23 budget review?**

- A great deal
  A fair amount
  Not very much
  Nothing at all

## Our approach

**Q2 Whilst achieving the necessary cuts is very difficult, the council continues to have a clear strategy for the delivery of its budget, which is outlined below. Please state how strongly you agree or disagree with each statement.**

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Ensure the most vulnerable are impacted least by the budget reductions as far as possible.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To move from universal services [a service that is available to anyone] to targeting provision and services for those most in need	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Maximise economic prosperity in Bolton to support economic growth, development and regeneration and job creation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
While putting the needs of local people and council taxpayers first, seek to minimise the impact on staff and avoid compulsory redundancies where possible	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Maximise proposals that improve efficiency, and make savings from management and administration where possible before frontline services	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

## Council Tax

The proposals put forward assume a 1.99% increase in council tax [subject to approval] and an additional 2% for Adult Social Care (subject to approval). A lower increase in council tax would mean even further cuts to services than those proposed.

As an indication this would add an average of £40.32 per year to a band A property and £53.77 per year to a band C property.

**Q3 Please state how strongly you agree or disagree that the council should raise council tax to the levels given above to balance the budget and avoid further cuts to services.**

- Strongly agree     
  Agree     
  Neither agree nor disagree     
  Disagree     
  Strongly disagree

## Proposals

In order to protect the most vulnerable children and adults in Bolton, and to avoid deeper cuts to directly delivered services, the council has had to make some very difficult decisions. Outlined below are some of the proposals put forward

**Q4 Please state how strongly you agree or disagree with each proposal**

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Reduce demand for council services by reviewing alternative delivery models, such as reviewing our customer facing services like the One Stop Shop	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Review of front-line services to look for more efficient ways of delivering provision, such as reviewing Highways and Engineering	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Reduce support for non-statutory services such as reviewing leisure centres, with a view to closures or sale	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Protect services for the children most vulnerable in the borough, by reducing provision in other areas within Children's Services, such as reviewing staffing and resources	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Protect services for the adults most vulnerable in the borough, by evaluating provision in other areas across Adult Services, such as reviewing the delivery model of Integrated Equipment Stores	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Increase charges for council services, such as parking	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
More effective partnership working, reviewing the scope to pool resources	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

## Managing change

The council is going through a period of unprecedented change. As described above, in making decisions about what to change, the council's priority is to maintain support for vulnerable children and adults in the borough while ensuring that we balance the books.

**Q5 With this in mind, please state how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements**

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I accept that budget reductions have to be made	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am aware of the need for the council to change the way it delivers its services	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I believe the council is doing its best under difficult circumstances	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

## Impact of the proposals

**Q6 Please describe how you / your family / the people you represent will be affected by the proposals**

## Alternative solutions

**Q7 Can you think of any other ways Bolton Council can make the savings whilst still delivering statutory services?**

## About you

So that we can understand how our proposals affect different residents, we would be grateful if you could answer the following questions. Your responses will not be used to contact you. Please leave any questions blank that you prefer not to answer.

**Q8 Which most closely describes your interest in this issue? Please tick one**

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="radio"/> A resident in the borough of Bolton                         | <input type="radio"/> A representative of community or voluntary group [please say which below]        |
| <input type="radio"/> A Bolton Council member of staff                            | <input type="radio"/> A representative of a business in the borough of Bolton [please say which below] |
| <input type="radio"/> An interested partner organisation [please say which below] | <input type="radio"/> Other [please explain below]   |

Please say which partner, group or business you are representing, and in what capacity. Please do not complete Q9 to Q14.

If 'other' please explain your interest.

Q9 Please give your full postcode

Q10 Which age range do you fall into?

- 24 or under       35 - 44       55 - 64       75 - 84  
 25 - 34       45 - 54       65 - 74       85 or over

Q11 Are you...?

- Female       Male       Other

Q12 Are your day to day activities limited because of a physical or mental health condition or illness which has lasted, or is expected to last, at least 12 months?

- Yes, limited a lot       Yes, limited a little       No

Q13 Do you look after, or give any help or support to anyone because they have long-term physical or mental health conditions or illnesses, or problems due to old age? [Don't include anything you do as part of your paid employment]

- No       Yes, 20 - 49 hours a week  
 Yes, 19 hours a week or less       Yes, 50 hours a week or more

Q14 What is your ethnic group?

- White British       Black, Black British, Caribbean or African  
 White other       Mixed or Multiple ethnic group  
 Asian or Asian British       Other ethnic group

**Thank you.**  
**Please post your completed questionnaire to**  
**Freepost RTTT-YTEL-YSXS, Consultation & Research Team, 2nd Floor, Town Hall,**  
**Bolton, BL1 1RU**



## TRADE UNION RESPONSE TO THE PUBLIC CONSULTATION FOR BUDGET OPTIONS 2021-2023

It is noted on the opening of the report, the 'Vision Outcomes'. The trade unions feel it is disingenuous to both our members and the public, to state that you will achieve improved, stronger, healthier communities by implementing such devastating cuts of up to £39 million, 20% of the councils remaining budget.

The working lives of members working for Bolton Council will be further impacted after 10 years of the Government's Austerity Programme, were members regularly feedback the pressure and stress of having to deliver more with less. The morale of staff following these cuts will immeasurable. On top of the proposals to make job cuts, members will face significant reductions in any 'Exit Payment' given the Government's imposed 95k Cap (see addendum 1) Bolton Council proposes a pay cut of over 1% of salary through an imposed 3-day Christmas shut down which will hit at the same time of the Governments proposals of Pay Freezes for public sector workers. **This is a red line for our members.** What an insult to thank workers for working through the 2020 Covid Pandemic, whom the public clapped, and thanked for recognition as being 'Key Workers', the back bone of society helping, playing their part in keeping the country running then inform them they are either going to lose their jobs, or face cuts to their pay. It simply is not acceptable.

The introduction of the council's proposals sets out budget cuts for 2021/2022 and 2022/2023 the requirement to find a total of 39.5m in cuts, when the reality is at least 37m of these proposed cuts are identified to be made in the first year. This is an unprecedented figure, it is unprecedented to make the cuts in 1 year and not 2, and without using any of the councils reserves to cushion the impact. It is unimaginable.

The report cites a National Pandemic having a major impact on the council budget. Costs outweighing the Government financial support, despite telling the nation that local authorities would not face financial detriment due to COVID. Local Authorities knew the challenges that lay ahead, knowing they would have to budget for the provision of public services through Council Tax and Business Rate collections, both areas contributing to the short fall of revenue as a direct impact of Covid.

It is with this in mind that the trade unions do not accept that in such dire times reserves cannot be used to subsidise the financial challenges we face. The budget proposals indicate there being in excess of 60 million held in reserves.

The budget proposals set out its estimate of a loss of 262 FTEs, of which 128 FTE are vacant posts. This is a concern to the Trade Unions that we have carried such a volume of vacancies and are unclear were such number of vacancies exist.

With the COVID 19 pandemic ongoing, it is unclear how the council will be able to meet with staff to effectively consult. Our members were angry when the Councils Officers, chose to inform them via a one-way video link of the pending Budget cuts. It was met with disbelief that they were receiving emails and correspondence from the council, thanking them for all their hard work during the ongoing crisis, the appreciation the council had for their ongoing commitment, but these were difficult times, and they will potentially be facing redundancy during the ongoing crisis.

## **Consultation**

**The budget consultation are ‘overall’ budget figures therefore the trade unions can only make assumptions on the overall announcements. There has been no in-depth consultation. When officers have been asked to expand on the budget headlines, the trade unions have been informed that the departments are still working up the detail.** Council Officers often make the argument that cuts need to be made to balance the books as they represent year on year costs. However, the cuts are made up of one off COVID-19 provisions and challenges. To ‘plug’ these with reserves appears to be one way forward.

## **Appendix A**

Raises the question for the trade unions regarding uncollected Council Tax. How much uncollected Council Tax was there for 2019-2020 and 2020-2021.

## **Appendix B**

### **Directorate of Children’s Services**

Year on Year cuts to services which provide preventative interventions have been seen as ‘soft options’ the trade unions have warned since the Austerity Cuts Agenda commenced the short-sighted approach, would result in a negative impact on children and their families within the borough. Our warning was simple, without preventative services, families would spiral into crisis more quickly, placing undue pressure on statutory social work, services including placements for children.

### **Directorate of Adults Services**

Three main areas with staff implications. Review of delivery model of integrated stores, staffing in Adults portfolio, and Intermediate Provision. Again, without the detail it is difficult to ‘consult’ however Adult Social Care is an area that is in crisis and any cuts to provision in this area will simply compound the issues this sector faces.

### **Directorate of Public Health**

Change of commissioner for specialist school nursing – Public Health currently pay for school nursing, special schools however need a more specialist role & this is to be transferred to Bolton CCG, the Trade Unions are unclear if this has happened yet.

Reduction in controllable budgets – not sure what budgets the council have control of, but we assume this is the training pot.

Review & reduce public health service contracts – We are aware that the council have only a handful. However, it is clear that following the pandemic, services requirements will be higher not less.

### **Directorate of Corporate Resources**

**3 days unpaid leave, members reject the council proposal and is a red line for the trade unions.**

No further detail.

### **Directorate of Place**

The Department of Place as been disproportionately affected by Council cuts over the last 10 years. Services are already showing huge signs of strain and members are regularly report that they just don’t have the resources to do their jobs effectively. We have serious concerns over all the proposals but due to the very limited information behind the ‘Strap lines’ it is difficult to provide a detailed response. We have particular concern over how the proposed cuts are to be achieved under the strap line ‘Waste, Neighbourhood and Community Services amalgamation’. The proposal states that 45.34 jobs are in scope and that the cuts target is £1,793,000. This seems a disproportionate figure across 45.34 jobs. We emphasise our overall concern that cuts of this magnitude mean a massive reduction in quality of the physical, social and economic infrastructure of the town including ability to enforce standards of safety.

Crossing Patrol, it is unclear how the department will deliver 107k of savings from the deletion on 5.42 posts, this area is made up of workers on the councils lowest PayScale, and contracts usually do not exceed 15 hours per week.

### **Trade Union Conclusion**

It is deeply disappointing for Bolton Council to announce in effect a one-year budget, it will be devastating on council provision, on public services, delivered to the people of Bolton. Many services are developed through staff commitment to their job roles, as public sector workers. Much like the role of elected members in office, who are elected by the people of Bolton to act in their best interest. It is deeply disappointing that some members will 'follow the party line' when they talk so passionately about being elected to serve the People of Bolton.

The gratitude to the thousands of staff who have worked, despite their own fears for their safety to carry on delivering essential services or redeploy to Humanitarian services to ensure the people of Bolton are looked after during these difficult times appears such an empty hollow gratitude.

And finally, to make cuts to services during the Covid-19 Pandemic which will result in job redundancies and lose of services, when we know the demand for many of our services will rise not decrease, when COVID-19 is eventually at a point that we can resume our 'New Normal'. The People of Bolton, have suffered enough during the pandemic.

Andrea Egan  
Branch Secretary  
Bolton UNISON Branch

Alan Flatley  
Convenor  
GMB Bolton Branch



A: The Bolton Hub, Bold Street,  
Bolton. BL1 1LS  
T: 01204 546010  
E: info@boltoncvs.org.uk  
W: www.boltoncvs.org.uk



Bolton Council  
Bolton Town Hall  
Victoria Square  
Bolton  
BL1 1RU

12<sup>th</sup> January 2021

**Bolton Council Budget Consultation - response from Bolton CVS**

To whom it may concern

Please find below the response from Bolton CVS to the Bolton Council budget consultation 2021.

**Please describe how the people you represent will be affected by the proposals**

Bolton CVS is the local infrastructure organisation for the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise Sector (VCSE) in Bolton. There is currently a lot of uncertainty around the effect of these proposals. However, a number of issues and concerns have been raised including:

- The impact of reduction in services on those most vulnerable in Bolton and the impact on inequalities already exacerbated by the Covid pandemic, eg social isolation, poverty, domestic violence, mental health and the effect on children and young people's health, wellbeing and life chances.
- The impact on the VCSE of increased demand for their services due to public sector cuts with limited additional resource/capacity and at a time when staff and volunteers are feeling the fatigue of Covid.
- The impact on those who experience digital poverty/not digitally-confident and for whom face-to-face services/ in-person services may be lost.
- The potential loss of key Bolton Council staff who provide connectivity to the VCSE sector, understand the nature and environment the sector operates in and the strength and value of what the sector delivers.
- The lack of certainty makes it difficult for the VCSE sector to continuity plan and manage what demand may look like in 2021-22.

**Can you think of any other ways Bolton Council can make the savings whilst still delivering statutory services?**

Bolton CVS fully recognise the need to prioritise the most vulnerable, particularly during the continued response to the Covid pandemic and the plans for future recovery. This must be done inclusively, putting residents and local communities at the heart.

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A: The Bolton Hub, Bold Street,  
Bolton. BL1 1LS  
T: 01204 546010  
E: [info@boltoncvs.org.uk](mailto:info@boltoncvs.org.uk)  
W: [www.boltoncvs.org.uk](http://www.boltoncvs.org.uk)



It is essential that any review of services consider the end-user or beneficiary.

Although tough decisions will need to be made around posts, it is important that any review considers a balanced decision around front-line services and the impact on beneficiaries alongside the leadership required to drive forward changes in a strategic, targeted and effective way. It is important that a Community Impact Assessment process is followed to understand what the impact will be on people and communities across the borough and in particular the most vulnerable in Bolton.

Bolton CVS believe that the VCSE sector in Bolton has significant experience of providing innovative preventative approaches and solutions. This has been demonstrated in the rapid and flexible way the VCSE sector has supported public sector partners and communities during the Covid pandemic.

We believe that the VCSE sector has the skills, knowledge and reach into communities and that it is essential that the VCSE sector is included in the design and delivery of new approaches - the VCSE can be 'the eyes and ears' in providing valuable grassroots data and intelligence in the shaping of services alongside the hard data available to us. Bolton's Fund has provided the opportunity to prove this concept and could be developed further to transform how we invest in communities. It is important that we have an open conversation about where the VCSE sector may be well-placed to deliver services traditionally provided by the public sector including opportunities there may be for asset/management transfer of community spaces and buildings.

In relation to maximising economic prosperity, it is important that Bolton Council and partners, prioritise approaches that develop the local workforce, encourage recruitment from within communities and neighbourhoods, build on local supply chains and opportunities to develop training and apprenticeship opportunities with local employers. This can be supported through building on the Bolton 2030 approach to social value.

Approaches which join up public sector services better (not just Council services) could provide savings and provide a better journey for the end-user. Could Bolton Council work with other public sector partners to identify opportunities for employment/re-deployment of the workforce into other organisations? Working collaboratively and strategically may prevent people becoming unemployed and also prevent loss of skills, knowledge and experience.

Thank you for the opportunity to participate in this consultation.

Yours faithfully

Helen Tomlinson, Interim CEO, Bolton CVS.

