



# Balancing the Budget – consultation on the Council's future budget plans 2018-21

Final report  
January 2018

## Introduction

'Balancing the Budget' is Cheshire West and Chester Council's consultation on its budget plans for 2018-21 and early ideas for future budgeting. The consultation focused on the additional savings required to meet the budget challenge.

The Council is approaching the third year of a four-year plan, which was extensively consulted on in 2015/16 ('Let's Talk' consultation). The nature of any four-year plan is that some adjustments are inevitable; the aim of this consultation was to enable local residents, businesses and other stakeholders to comment on these proposed adjustments and to consider future budget planning.

The consultation was open to all and took place over six weeks between 12 October and 23 November 2017. A range of methods were available to hear people's views, including:

- An online debate with Cabinet, where the public could send in questions for Cabinet to answer live during a webcast
- An interactive budget simulator, where participants could have a go at setting the Council's budget
- A consultation document and questionnaire – available online, in hardcopy and in Easy Read format
- Dedicated social media channels, email, telephone number and postal address for responses.

The consultation was underpinned by an innovative communications plan, including Twitter videos, which is outlined on page 31.

In all, 700 people submitted a response and over 1,730 people engaged with the consultation in some form. More information about the consultation process is available on page 29.



## Key messages

Below are the overarching messages that have emerged from the consultation:

- There was broad agreement with the Council's proposals for 'Thriving People' (68% agreed and 9% disagreed), 'Thriving Places' (69% agreed and 12% disagreed) and 'Thriving Council' (73% agreed and 8% disagreed).
- Many stressed the importance of services that support people, particularly those most vulnerable, and felt that these services should be protected from cuts. This was supported by results from the budget simulator, where the average increase for the Adult Social Care Precept was 1.6%.
- Those completing the budget simulator increased Council Tax by an average of 2.26%. Where people supported an increase in Council Tax, this was to maintain and protect key services. Those that did not support an increase in Council Tax were concerned that the current charge is already a challenge for some residents to meet, or that further efficiencies could be made to offset the need for increases.
- There was strong support for reducing inefficiency and waste, and managing contracts effectively.
- Participants were keen to ensure that the impact of any budget reductions were minimised on front-line services and staff. In particular, roads and transport were frequently mentioned as areas to improve and maintain.
- There was general support for introducing new technology to become more efficient, as long as it represents value for money and is well managed. In terms of contacting the Council, many felt that technology can play a vital role in driving efficiency, as long as there are still options for residents to contact the Council using more traditional methods including face-to-face and telephone.
- There was support for integration of services and partnership working to avoid duplication and generate efficiencies. Integration of adult social care and health services is a good example of this.



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## Structure of this report

This report brings together findings from the consultation questionnaire, the online event, budget simulator and all other correspondence including social media, emails and letters. The results from the questionnaire, online event and other correspondence are summarised in the 'Thriving People', 'Thriving Places' and 'Thriving Council' sections. The results of the budget simulator are presented in a dedicated chapter.

## Thriving People

The 'Thriving People' area of the Council includes services such as Adult Social Care, Children's Social Care, support for vulnerable families, education and Public Health.

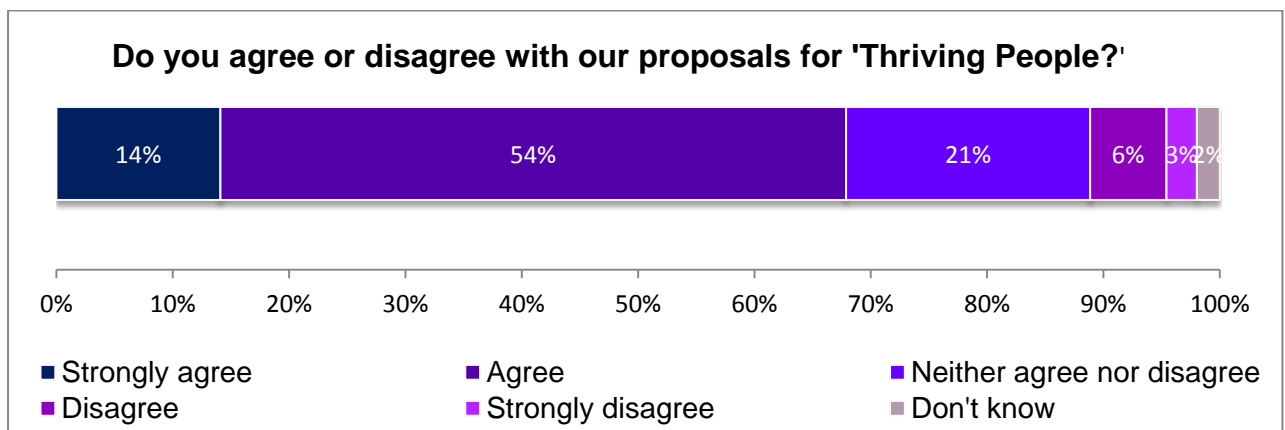
Savings of £804,000 have been proposed for these service areas, which is the smallest reduction across the Council. Proposals under consideration are:

- A1. Reducing back office support staff
- A2. Contract savings
- A3. Community safety review
- A4. Arranging care in a more efficient way
- A5. Reviewing our non-staffing budgets
- A6. Review of bed-based provision

More details about these proposals are available in the booklet – 'Balancing the Budget – consultation on our future budget plans 2018-21' on page 7.

## General views on Thriving People proposals

Those completing the questionnaire were asked if they generally agreed or disagreed with the proposals for Thriving People. The chart below shows that 68% agreed with the proposals, 9% disagreed, 21% neither agreed nor disagreed and 2% didn't know.





Base for graph: 305 respondents

## Views on specific budget proposals

The two proposals that received the most comments in the questionnaire were A1 (Reducing back office support staff) and A4 (Arranging care in a more efficient way). Views about the proposals were:

**A1 - Reducing back office support staff:** Whilst there was some agreement, the majority of comments raised concerns about the impact on the remaining staff, who would be required to pick up extra work and could be under additional stress. Having fewer staff could also impact on the level and quality of services. A few queried whether savings could be made from higher paid roles instead of back office support staff.

**A2 - Contract savings:** There was support for this proposal as it could reduce duplication, as long as services are not compromised. A few commented that services could be better run in-house than under contract.

**A3 - Community safety review:** Whilst there was some support for this review, (provided that cuts were kept to a minimum), the majority expressed concern that services would be affected. Many were keen to emphasise the importance of community policing, which should not be compromised.

**A4 - Arranging care in a more efficient way:** There were mixed views about this proposal with some feeling that it would free-up social workers to concentrate on key work, whereas others felt social workers would be closer to the client and be better placed to arrange care. Some were concerned that one-to-one contact between the service user and the social worker would be reduced.

**A5 - Reviewing our non-staffing budgets:** There was support for this proposal, though some scepticism that it might not generate sufficient savings and that reducing investment in IT could be a backwards step.

**A6 - Review of bed-based provision:** The majority supported this proposal, with some feeling that this would increase efficiencies across the services. A few respondents had concerns about whether teams would work well together, or whether this could result in more of a local rather than national cost and result in an increase in Council Tax.

## Views on emerging ideas

In addition to the proposals, the Council is also exploring other ideas to address budget challenges beyond 2020. These include:

- A7. Integration of Adult Social Care and NHS services
- A8. Children's residential care provision



More details about these ideas can be found on page 7 of the Balancing the Budget consultation document.

Proposal A7 received more feedback than A8.

**A7 - Integration of Adult Social Care and NHS services:** The majority were in strong agreement and felt this integration needs to happen as soon as possible. People felt this could create efficiencies and help to avoid duplication. Concerns were around whether the NHS would be able to cope with this integration as staff and services are already stretched, and effective performance monitoring is required to ensure service quality is not compromised. It was recognised that this could take a lot of work and flexibility from both organisations to make it a success.

**A8 - Children's residential care provision:** The majority of those commenting agreed that this could be more efficient and reduce duplication. Some people supported this work being undertaken in-house, as well as stressing the importance of services for children. Concerns related to the cost of a bespoke service and ensuring that staff have the right skills to do this work.

### Other views on Thriving People issues

General comments were made during the consultation via the questionnaire, emails and social media, which were not in relation to a specific proposal. Key themes included:

- The importance of service areas related to people, and need to prioritise them. In particular, protection for vulnerable people, including the elderly.
- Concerns that People Services have been cut in the past, or could suffer if budgets continue to reduce.
- Opportunities for efficiencies in the future and a view that resources may have been wasted in the past.
- Several people specifically commented on the importance of:
  - Mental Health services
  - Provision of services for people with Autism and Asperger's syndrome
  - Supporting people who have problems with addiction such as alcohol, drugs and gambling.



## Thriving Places

This area of the Council includes services such as maintaining roads, managing planning applications, licencing premises, collecting household waste, maintaining public spaces and supporting local economic growth.

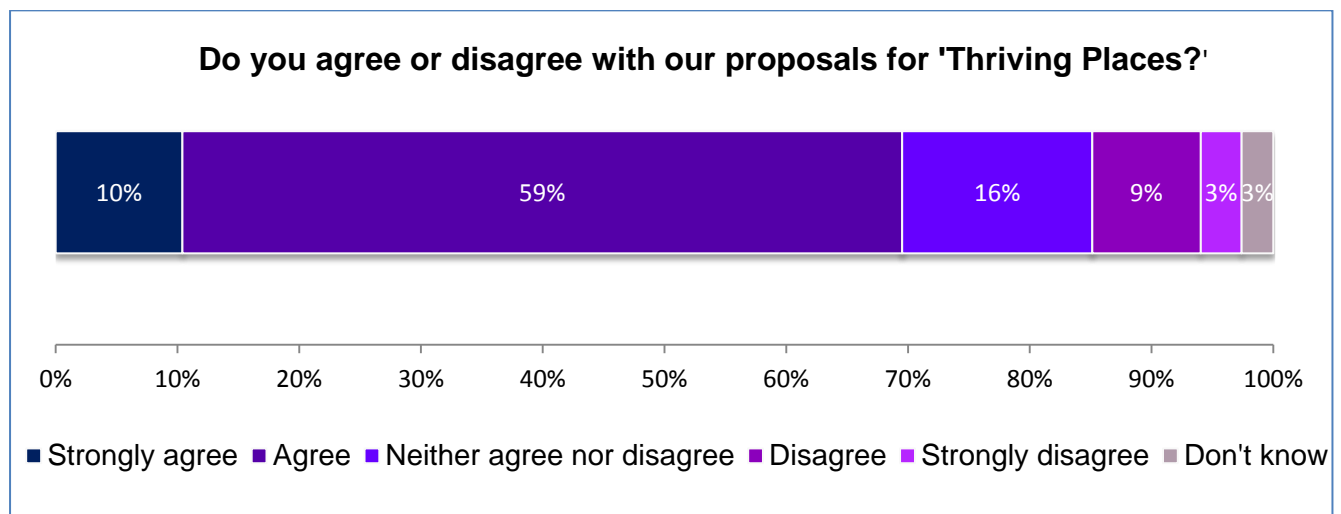
Savings of approximately £1 million have been proposed for these service areas, which includes:

- B1. Staffing efficiencies
- B2. Income generation
- B3. Concessionary fares

More details about these proposals are available in the booklet – ‘Balancing the Budget – consultation on our future budget plans 2018-21’ on page 9.

## General views on Thriving Places proposals

Those completing the questionnaire were asked if they generally agreed or disagreed with the proposals for Thriving Places. The chart below shows that 69% agreed with the proposals, 12% disagreed, 16% neither agreed nor disagreed and 3% didn't know.



Base for graph: 269 respondents

## Views on specific budget proposals

Some respondents conveyed their overall agreement with these proposals without expanding further. There were also some concerns about specific proposals. The proposal with the most feedback in this section was B1.

**B1 - Staffing efficiencies:** There were positive views about the use of technology, as long as staff are fully trained in how to use it. However, the majority expressed concerns about the impact on service levels, with some feeling that more needs to





be done in their local areas, such as having clean streets, well-maintained roads and waste/recycling. Some noted the potential for extra pressure and stress on remaining staff and a few participants suggested reducing higher paid staff roles, rather than staff 'on the ground'.

**B2 - Income generation:** Some general agreement for this if it results in efficiencies, along with a suggestion to increase Council Tax to generate income, or charge residents for services that are optional. Some concerns were raised with regards to which services might incur charges.

**B3 - Concessionary fares:** Many stressed that this was a vital service for pensioners and were keen to ensure that bus passes are not taken away (note that it was not proposed to remove bus passes). Some commented on general public transport and parking issues.

## Views on emerging ideas

Further proposals being explored to address future budget challenges are:

- B4. Further income generation
- B5. Service reviews
- B6. Staffing restructures
- B7. Collaboration

More details about these ideas can be found on page 9 of the Balancing the Budget consultation document.

**B4 - Further income generation:** Whilst some responded positively to the idea of income generation in principle, there were concerns about the potential risks (such as investing in commercial property). Some queried how income generation would be managed whilst maintaining the existing level of service, and that this might be problematic if there are staff reductions (as in proposal B1).

**B5 - Service reviews:** There were some positive comments and also some concerns about whether technology can replace experienced staff and the need for monitoring service standards.

**B6 - Staffing restructures:** This was generally welcomed, and many felt that if cuts are made, it should be to managerial levels rather than frontline.

**B7 - Collaboration:** There were mixed views on this. Some respondents expressed strong agreement and didn't expand on their answer, or commented on the potential improvements for transport links. Whereas others raised concerns about the practicalities of collaboration and it may become unmanageable - collaborative partners are not always equal.



## Other views on Thriving Places issues

General comments were made during the consultation via the questionnaire, emails and social media, which were not in relation to a specific proposal. Key themes included:

### Recycling and waste collection:

- Some suggested generating income from selling waste, for composting or from items taken to household recycling centres for example.
- There were some views that the frequency of waste collections could be reduced and the use of centres should be encouraged, as well as the opposite viewpoint that opening hours of centres could be reduced and more waste/recycling collected directly from homes.
- The quality of recycling boxes and bins was raised as litter can sometimes spill onto the streets on windy days.
- Fly-tipping was identified as an issue by some participants, particularly the cost of clearing it, which may be a result of altering waste centres' opening times, the additional travel for some residents to get there and the cost of collecting bulky waste items.

### Regeneration:

- A number of people commented on the Northgate development, regarding the funding and the risk involved with this investment.
- Similarly, some commented on the Barons Quay development and felt that the project has not been very successful (partly due to shops not being let yet).
- Further investment is required in towns such as Ellesmere Port and Winsford. Sustainable economic growth was encouraged by some people, however others felt that some growth projects are too much of a financial risk.
- Some respondents felt that the Council should reduce business rates to help fill empty units. In particular, Chester, Barons Quay and Ellesmere Port were mentioned.

### Parking and charges:

- Some respondents felt that car parking charges are too expensive, and should not be introduced in places where it is currently free to park due to the impact on businesses. There is also some support for the 'Free after 3' tariff.
- It was suggested that certain restrictions or arrangements for parking permits could be introduced in some areas (for example, residential areas, permits for businesses) to generate income and encourage safer, less obstructive parking, and there needs to be more parking enforcement.

### Roads and speed limits:

- Some people expressed disagreement with 20mph speed limits being introduced, were critical of their locations and thought that there would be little enforcement.



- General comments were received about road repairs and works not being up to standard first time around.
- Some suggested that street lighting and traffic signals could be switched off or dimmed at certain times overnight.

#### **Sustainable energy and clean cars:**

- Some commented that the Council could do more to support sustainable energy options including cheap electric vehicles and charging points.

#### **Transport including bus services:**

- A few comments were received about local public transport, with some respondents happy with services, and others feeling that transport links in general need improving.

#### **Clean and tidy streets:**

- Some people stressed the importance of clean streets, and some felt that the Council could try to use more volunteers or charities for some jobs, or encourage communities to get involved in keeping their local areas clean and tidy.

#### **Parks and open spaces:**

- Several people commented that parks and open spaces need to be utilised to their full potential and possibly generate income.

#### **Housing and homelessness:**

- Some respondents mentioned the importance of affordable housing as a priority, as well as the need to tackle homelessness. Several comments were received about reviewing Planning processes regarding housing.

### **Feedback about specific locations**

Where we had a number of comments about specific locations, these have been summarised below.

#### **Chester:**

- As well as issues already mentioned, such as homelessness and the Northgate development, ideas for where the market could be re-located, the effect of race days and students were noted.

#### **Main towns - Ellesmere Port, Frodsham and Neston**

- Some people felt that these places needed more investment and lose out compared to other locations in the borough.



## Thriving Council

The 'Thriving Council' area of the Council includes support services such as Finance, Legal, Communications and Information Technology.

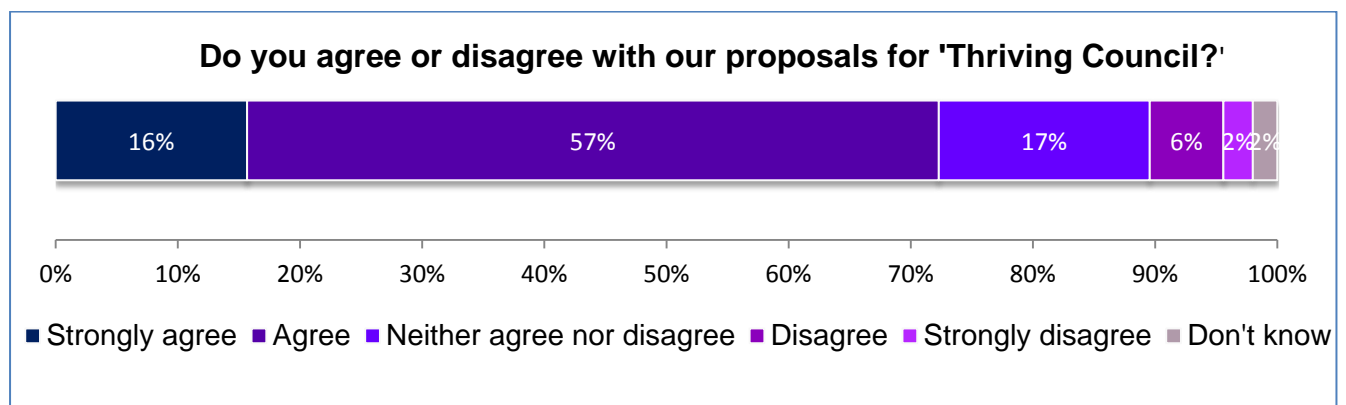
Savings of £1.5 million have been proposed for these service areas, which include:

- C1. Reducing the use of consultancy
- C2. Using new technology to make back office services more efficient
- C3. Further efficiencies to back office services
- C4. Responding to external opportunities

More details about these proposals are available in the booklet – 'Balancing the Budget – consultation on our future budget plans 2018-21' on page 11.

## General views on Thriving Council proposals

Those completing the questionnaire were asked if they generally agreed or disagreed with the proposals for Thriving Council. The chart below shows that 73% agreed with the proposals, 8% disagreed, 17% neither agreed nor disagreed and 2% didn't know.



Base for graph: 249 respondents

## Views on specific budget proposals

There was some generally positive feedback received in relation to the proposals in this section. The proposals that received the most comments were C1 and C2.

**C1 - Reducing the use of consultancy:** Strong agreement to reduce the use of external consultants and use internal staff instead. A few participants had a different view and felt that sometimes consultants have more expertise to offer and can avoid costly mistakes.

**C2 - Using new technology to make back office services more efficient:** Some respondents felt that automation and technology is the way forward, and is more efficient. However, there were concerns that technology cannot be relied upon,



which may create duplication for staff having to 'fill the gap'. Some queried whether the cost of technology was worth the investment, plus the possibility of losing staff with valuable experience and knowledge

**C3 - Further efficiencies to back office services:** The majority of views were in disagreement, with concern expressed about the impact on service standards, especially as these staff are seen as key to services.

**C4 - Responding to external opportunities:** There was some agreement with this proposal as well as some concerns, especially in relation to the introduction of Universal Credit and the support required to make this a success.

### Views on emerging ideas

In addition to the proposals, the Council is also exploring other ideas to address budget challenges beyond 2020. These include:

- C5. Digital transformation
- C6. Supporting Council companies to generate income

More details about these ideas can be found on page 11 of the 'Balancing the Budget' consultation document.

**C5 - Digital transformation:** This option received a lot of feedback with nearly all comments expressing strong disagreement, as respondents felt it is essential for people to be able to speak to a member of staff on the phone, face-to-face, or write a letter. Respondents felt that older people, and those who don't have the internet or know how to use it, would be disadvantaged if there were no alternative methods of communication available. (Note that those taking part in the consultation via the budget simulator generally expressed a much more positive view on the use of technology).

**C6 - Supporting Council companies to generate income:** Some people were in favour of the Council generating income. There were some concerns that income could be prioritised over services.

### Other views on Thriving Council issues

Some comments were made in response to the consultation that did not specifically relate to the proposals. Comments have been received via questionnaires, social media and email and covered the following topic areas:

**Management and Councillors' costs:** There were a number of suggestions about reducing the number of senior managers and reducing the salaries of higher paid Council staff. There was also support for reducing the number of Councillors and reviewing expenses and salaries.



**The level of Council Tax:** Some respondents were opposed to any increase in Council Tax and felt that increasing it is unreasonable as some residents will struggle to afford it or feel they won't see any additional services for an increase. However, some people were in favour of increasing Council Tax in order to maintain the level of service already received, to improve aspects of their local area and to prevent budget cuts impacting on services.

**General spend and cuts:** It was felt by some that services and residents will suffer if budget cuts continue. Conversely, some felt that money had not been well-spent in the past, and some projects and schemes had wasted valuable resources. Others commented that work is not always done properly first time around and has to be repeated. A few people commented that spend is not fairly spread across geographical areas.



## Findings from the Online Budget Simulator

### Introduction and Background

As part of the 'Balancing the Budget' consultation an online budget simulator was used as a method of engagement with local residents and stakeholders. This budget simulator was available at: <https://cheshirewestandchester.budgetsimulator.com/> from Thursday 12 October 2017 to Thursday 23 November 2017, ensuring that it was open for the full six-week consultation period.

The budget simulator website was developed through an organisation called 'Delib', a company that specialises in digital democracy, including online consultation and citizen engagement. To date, Delib has successfully run budget simulators with over 100 organisations, worth a collective value in excess of \$80 billion.

The 'Balancing the Budget' simulator presented respondents with Cheshire West and Chester's current budget of £277 million, and required participants to make reductions of £38.33 million in order to set a balanced budget position for the Council.

Cheshire West and Chester's existing budget was divided into several service areas, with accompanying descriptions of the services and responsibilities that were funded through these budgets. Participants were presented with the decision to either increase, maintain, or reduce levels of spending for each of these services areas. Any changes to these service budgets were accompanied by illustrative consequences that highlighted to participants the potential impact of their decisions. These consequences were presented to participants as they completed the tool, and were summarised prior to their final submission.

Alongside these potential changes to service budgets, residents were also presented with the opportunity to change the budget through the Council's approach to income generation, through potential changes to charges and fees for services such as commercial rent and car parking, as well as through increasing or decreasing Council Tax levels.

Alongside the changes to the budget through the 'sliders', participants were also provided with free text boxes to make comments to explain or support their changes.

### Commissioning Delib

There are a number of organisations that have developed online budget simulators. It was decided that the Delib tool was most appropriate for this consultation as it has



been used by many other Local Authorities across the United Kingdom for similar exercises. This decision was supported by the fact that the Delib tool is compliant with the Equality Act, and that the tool allows for participants to complete the simulator on mobile phones, tablets as well as desktop computers. It also provides a different way for the public and partners to contribute to the budget debate.

The fact that the budget simulator was linked to social media also allowed for the exercise to be promoted by participants amongst their online networks, encouraging a greater response rate. This approach was also supported as the simulator was maintained by dedicated staff in order to provide technical support should any issues arise.

### Simulator Structure Expenditure

The simulator was designed to contain 27 sliders to allow sufficient influence over the budget without the tool becoming too time consuming to complete. Twenty-two of these sliders related to the expenditure of the Council, with five sliders relating to generating income. These individual budgets were grouped together under the following headings:

- Adult Social Care & Health;
- Children & Families;
- Place Based Services;
- Corporate Services;
- Income;
- Council Tax;
- Adult Social Care & Health – Council Tax Precept.

Participants were presented with the opportunity to change the expenditure of the Council to establish a balanced budget; this enabled them to increase the spending on specific services by either 5% or 10%. Participants were also able to reduce expenditure on these services by 10%, 20% or 30%. Finally, the option was available for respondents to maintain current expenditure through a 0% change.

### Completion Rates

In total 300 people completed the budget simulator during a six-week period. The table below provides further information on the number of unique users who accessed the website, and the average time taken to set a balanced budget.





Total unique users:	2,335
Total completions :	300
Conversion rate:	9.9% of those accessing the website
Time per completion:	4:33*
Total comments:	77 respondents left comments

\*The average time of 4 minutes and 33 seconds is taken from across mobile, desktop and table completions. This time only refers to the time taken by respondents to set a balanced budget, and does not include the time taken to read preliminary information, review their final submission, or provide demographic information.

### Completion Methods

We also know that respondents were more likely to complete the exercise using a mobile, desktop or laptop computer rather than a tablet, as set out in the table below:

Mobile phone	45%
Desktop or laptop	38%
Tablet	17%

### Profile of Participants

In total 226 of the 300 (approximately 75%) participants provided information regarding their personal information and wider demographics. From this group we are able to build the following profile of those who completed the online simulator:

<b>Sex:</b>	
Female:	20%
Male:	48%
Prefer not to say:	4%
Own Term:	1%
Did not provide response:	27%
<b>Age:</b>	
16-24	6%
25-34	21%
35-44	15%
45-54	14%
55-64	10%
65-74	4%
75 and over	1%
Did not provide response:	29%



<b>Responding as:</b>	
A local business	1%
A local resident	65%
An Elected Councillor / Town & Parish Councillor	1%
A Council Employee	5%
Other	4%
Did not provide response:	24%

(N.B. Information regarding race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation of respondents was also gathered through this simulator and this breakdown is available upon request).

## Headline Findings

Residents were presented with the options of changing the expenditure of the Council against 22 service areas. The table below presents the average changes that were submitted to each of these services. The first column of this table sets out the grouping of service areas, the second column outlines the average changes within these 'sub-headings'. The third column sets out the title for each of these service areas, with the final column setting out the individual changes for each slider.

It should be noted, that the requirement for respondents to set a balanced budget means that respondents have to reduce expenditure. Therefore, the table below does not illustrate the intention of residents, but should rather be viewed as their response within our financial context, and to support the prioritisation of resources.

<b>Sub Heading Title</b>	<b>Total sub heading reduction:</b>	<b>Slider Title / Budget Title:</b>	<b>Average Change to Slider:</b>
Adults Social Care and Health	-12.07%	Arranging and purchasing care	-10.98%
		Supporting people to live at home	-10.23%
		Care homes	-9.49%
		Supporting healthy lifestyles	-17.59%
Children and Families	-7.34%	Child protection	-4.97%
		Support to families and young people	-9.46%
		Support to schools	-7.59%
Places Services	-12.03%	Clean and green streets	-11.14%
		Culture, leisure and libraries	-13.32%
		Community safety and consumer protection	-11.88%
		Customer services and engagement	-16.50%
		Roads and transport	-8.58%
		Housing and planning	-12.31%
		Support to business and regeneration	-12.31%
Waste management	-10.17%		



Corporate Services	-15.15%	Improving the council's performance	-13.85%
		Managing our buildings	-16.39%
		Governance and accountability	-15.03%
		Human resources and training	-16.14%
		ICT and equipment	-14.13%
		Supporting councillors	-17.85%
		Managing payments to and from our residents	-12.66%

### Services with smallest and largest reductions

Due to the requirement to reduce the overall budget by £38.33 million to set a balanced budget position in the simulator, there was limited opportunity for widespread increases to budgets to address this challenge. Therefore, all of the services included present as a reduction on average. Therefore analysis should be made into those services which had the smallest and largest reductions, and the associated prioritisation that may have taken place with residents.

The table below illustrates the services to which participants have made the smallest level of reductions within the simulator.

	Service Description	Average reduction:
1.	Child Protection	4.97%
2.	Support for Schools	7.59%
3.	Roads and Transport	8.58%
4.	Care Homes	9.46%
5.	Support for Families and Young People	9.46%

Equal prominence must also be given to the service titles that residents made the biggest reductions to, as this may illustrate less prioritisation. The table below highlights the services that participants made the largest level of reductions to within the simulator.

	Service Description	Average reduction:
1.	Support for Councillors	17.85%
2.	Supporting Healthy Lifestyles	17.59%
3.	Customer Services and Engagement	16.5%
4.	Managing our Buildings	16.39%
5.	Human Resources and Training	16.14%

These tables demonstrate that participants have made a smaller level of reductions to services for children and young people, with the three budget sliders for Children's Services all within the top five 'least reduced' budgets. These are accompanied by the budgets for Care Homes as well as roads and transport.

The largest reductions have predominantly been made to 'back office' services, with corporate budgets accounting for four of the five areas with largest reductions. The only service included in this second table which does not originate from the



corporate sub-heading is the Public Health budget presented as ‘supporting healthy lifestyles’.

Beyond the statistical returns that we have through the budget simulator, we also received 77 comments through the simulator website. As these comments account for approximately 25% of respondents, they should be viewed alongside the wider statistical returns from the simulator to illustrate trends and issues.

## Adult Social Care and Health

A total of 19 people made comments on their proposed amendments to the budgets for Adult Social Care and Health services. The themes to emerge from within these comments include:

**Prioritisation due to preventative practice:** There were a number of respondents who expressed that they were reluctant to reduce these services. Some of these respondents stated that this was because these services were important to local residents, but more commonly was as a result of respondents recognising the benefits that these services would have over a longer period of time to the Council and wider public sector partners.

**Healthy Lifestyles:** There were a significant number of comments left in opposition to the budget slider for ‘supporting healthy lifestyles’. A small number of these comments stated that the responsibility for these services belonged to other public sector organisations (such as the NHS). However, more commonly, these comments stated that lifestyle choices belonged to individuals and that the Council should not interfere or have the responsibility for interfering in these matters. This reflects this budget being the second most reduced at 17.59%.

**Contract Reviews:** There was a mixed view regarding the Council’s relationship with Private Care Providers, with many respondents believing contracts could be more efficiently managed, or more effectively delivered directly by the Council.

## Children and Families

A total of 10 people made comments on their proposed amendments to the budgets for services for Children and Families. The themes to emerge from within these comments include:

**Prioritisation:** There were a small number of comments which reflect the prioritisation of this service within the quantitative returns. This included some participants considering the impact that reductions in these services would have on vulnerable and young residents.

**School Efficiencies:** Whilst the support provided to schools was the budget area which received the second lowest levels of reductions, there were a number of



comments which called upon schools to be more efficient, or to achieve more for less. This is in contrast to the 7.59% reduction which these services received on average.

**Partnership Working:** There were comments which called for more joint working with partner agencies on themes of Child Protection, and work with expertise in the Voluntary and Community Sector.

## Place Based Services

A total of 26 people made comments on their proposed amendments to the budgets of place-based services. The themes to emerge from within these comments include:

**Roads and Transport:** The prioritisation of roads and transport (one of the least reduced services at 8.58%) is reflected in a number of comments. This includes participants calling for more money to be spent on roads to address issues such as pot-holes, as well as calls for investment into wider roads infrastructure to support movement across the borough.

**Waste Collection:** There was a very broad range of opinions expressed on waste collection. This included views that our current service is generous, and could be reduced. However, this was countered with other responses that reductions would be counterproductive. These responses also included additional ideas, such as the potential to charge for homes to have additional waste containers, the use of collective green bins within neighbourhoods, or less regular green waste collection in the winter.

**Business Support:** Whilst the budget heading of support to businesses and regeneration received an average reduction of 12.3%, there were a number of comments in opposition to Council resources being used for this purpose. This included some respondents stating that businesses should support themselves, or that it was not the Council's role to offer them support.

**Online Services:** There were a number of comments which stated their support for more Council services and functions to be placed online. Whilst there were no comments in opposition to services being placed online, there was a small number which recognised that this may be an inconvenience to some residents. This widespread support for online services will reflect the fact that the budget simulator was an online engagement tool.

## Corporate Services

A total of 21 people made comments on their proposed amendments to the budgets for corporate services. The themes to emerge from within these comments include:



**Councillors:** The area within the budget simulator with the biggest levels of reductions is support provided to Councillors at 17.85%. There are a number of comments within the simulator which reflect these reductions, with some respondents calling for reductions in the number of Councillors at the Council, and the level of remuneration that they receive.

**Council Staff and Management:** There were a significant number of comments regarding the potential for the Council to save money through reductions in tiers of management, and the level of pay provided to senior management. These comments often extended across the cost of staff, including pensions and redundancies. Whilst there is no single budget within the simulator for 'management', this was a common theme that was raised under the corporate section of the budget simulator.

**Use of Council Resources:** There were a significant number of comments that the council could generate efficiencies in contracts and processes. This included calls for systems to be automated where possible, and the development of more efficient working practices.

**Use of Buildings:** The management of Council Buildings was the fourth most heavily reduced budget within the simulator at 16.39%. This was reflected in a number of comments which recognised the benefits of using building spaces more creatively. This included a number of responses which recognised that the introduction of working-from-home arrangements had the potential to save money, alongside some suggestions to generate income through the rental of Council Offices and assets. Finally, a comment was included around the opportunity that changes to the Council's use of offices presented in terms of creating better links with partner and voluntary and community sector organisations.

## Income

Alongside the 22 Budget sliders that participants could control to increase or reduce spending, they were also presented with information regarding the Council's ability to generate income. These included the charges received through Parking, Commercial Rent, and the fees for services such as crematoriums and cemeteries. Information was also presented on Council Tax and the Adult Social Care Precept.

The table below illustrates the average slider change that was received for each of these areas:



Sub Heading Title	Total sub heading reduction:	Slider Title / Budget Title:	Average Change to Slider:
Income: Charges and Fees	+5.33%	Car Parking	+5.3%
		Cemeteries, crematoria & registration	+5.9%
		Commercial Rent	+4.8%
Income: Council Tax	+ 2.26%	Council Tax	+ 2.26%
Adult Social Care Precept	+ 1.6%	Adult Social Care Precept	+ 1.6%

### Income Charges and Fees

There were a total of 17 comments received on the areas of income generation included in the simulator (Car Parking, Cemeteries, and Commercial Rent). The themes that have emerged through these comments include:

**Car Parking:** There were very mixed views expressed on car parking within the simulator, but on balance, the comments reflect that there was more opposition than support for increases. There were a range of factors behind this opposition.

**Impact on City Centre:** There were a number of responses regarding the potential impact of parking charges and commercial rent on the vibrancy of the city centre. It was believed that if these charges were too high it may result in empty properties, and that increased parking charges could result in people shopping outside of the town centre

**Current Levels of Charging:** Despite an average level of increase of 5.33% across these services, the comments included a significant number of opponents to any increases, with many respondents stating that the current level was already too high.

### Adult Social Care Precept

There were a total of eight comments on the issue of the Adult Social Care Precept included in the budget simulator. Some of the themes within these comments include:

**Adult Social Care Precept:** The majority of comments support the precept for Adult Social Care, recognising the specific nature for how the money would be used. However, there was a smaller amount of opposition, requesting pensioners to fund their own services.



The table below shows the total number of people who called for an increase through the Adult Social Care Precept, and the level of increase that they submitted. It should be noted that as the Precept can only be used to address demands and pressures within Adult Social Care and Health, any increase to this budget slider did not contribute towards closing the budget gap. Therefore may have seen fewer increases as it did not directly contribute towards closing the £38.33 million budget gap.

<b>Position on the Adult Social Care Precept:</b>	<b>No. Respondents:</b>
There would be no increase in Council Tax to support additional service pressures in adult social care services.	121
A 1% increase in Council Tax in 2018-19 with no increase in 2019-20. This funding would be used only for adult social care services.	49
A 2% increase in Council Tax over the two years to 2019-20 (i.e. 1% each year). This funding would be used only for adult social care services.	34
A 3% increase in Council Tax over the two years to 2019-20 (i.e. 2% in 2018-19 and 1% in 2019-20). This funding would be used only for adult social care services.	21
A 4% increase in Council Tax over the two years to 2019-20 (i.e. 2% each year). This funding would be used only for adult social care services.	75

## Council Tax

There were a total of 25 comments on the level of Council Tax set through the simulator. Some of the themes within these comments include:

**Increase in Council Tax:** A significant number of comments said that they would be willing to pay an increase in Council Tax. This was often stated as acknowledgement of inflation, or recognition of the need to fund services due to rising demand.

**Opposition to Council Tax Increases:** There were also a significant number of respondents who stated that Council Tax should not be increased, noting that the existing levels were already a challenge for some residents to meet. There were also a number of respondents who opposed increases as they believed that further efficiencies could be delivered to offset the need for increases.





**Council Tax Assistance:** There were mixed views regarding the provision of support to residents to pay their Council Tax (e.g. the Council Tax assistance scheme). This included the same number asking for any increases to Council Tax to continue to provide this support to residents, as those who believed this support should be entirely removed.

**Referendum:** The budget simulator informed respondents that any increase of Council Tax over 2% would require a referendum to gain approval. Whilst the average level of increase is above the limit at 2.26%, all of the comments that reference this issue oppose the use of a referendum (no respondents directly called for the use of a referendum on Council Tax).

The table below illustrates all of the levels of returns that were received on the Council Tax slider. This was presented as an annual increase, with respondents provided with a range from a 4% increase to a 4% decrease from 2018 to 2021:

Annual Change to Council Tax:	Description Text:	Number of Respondents:
-4%	Council Tax will go down by 4% a year from 2018 to 2021.	6
-3%	Council Tax will go down by 3% a year from 2018 to 2021.	0
-2%	Council Tax will go down by 2% a year from 2018 to 2021.	0
-1%	Council Tax will go down by 1% a year from 2018 to 2021.	5
0%	Council Tax will remain the same for the next three years	38
+1%	Council Tax will go up by 1% a year from 2018 to 2021.	38
+2%	Council Tax will go up by 2% a year from 2018 to 2021. This will require a local referendum to be approved; costing approximately £425,000.	70
+3%	Council Tax will go up by 3% a year from 2018 to 2021. This will require a local referendum to be approved, costing approximately £425,000.	41
+4%	Council Tax will go up by 4% a year from 2018 to 2021. This will require a local referendum to be approved; costing approximately £425,000.	102

This table shows that the majority of respondents (251/300) submitted an increase in their Council Tax, with the most common level of increase being at 4%.



## Local Government Finance Settlement

On Tuesday 19 December, the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government Sajid Javid gave his statement on the Local Government Finance Settlement for 2018-2019. In this statement Local Authorities were given the authority to increase their core Council Tax by an additional 1% without conducting a local referendum. Therefore, Local Authorities would be required to hold a referendum for any Council Tax increases of 3% or above.

As the budget simulator was open from 12 October to 23 November, prior to this announcement, it contained information regarding the need for a referendum on increases over 2%, including the local cost for conducting a referendum, as this was the national position at the launch of the consultation.



## Online event

The online event took place at the Lion Salt Works on 8<sup>th</sup> November and was broadcast live on the internet. The event was hosted by BBC journalist Mark Edwardson and featured a panel of Cabinet Members answering questions submitted by the public. A residents' panel made up of three members of the public participated in the event by interacting with Cabinet, offering comments and also asking questions. Questions were divided into themes and covered the following topics:

### Children and Young people:

- Funding for children with disabilities
- Views on the services that support children
- Helping children reach their full potential
- Financial pressures on children's services

### Regeneration:

- Northgate development plans and investment
- General plans for regeneration in Chester
- Barons Quay and Northwich regeneration plans
- Regeneration elsewhere, e.g. Winsford.

### Social care for older people:

- Funding pressures on adult social care services
- Funding for council run care homes
- Supporting people to be more independent
- Supporting people following being discharged from hospital.

### Housing:

- Affordable housing in the borough
- Building Council houses
- Support for homeless people
- How the council deals with rogue landlords

### The environment:

- Cost effectiveness of new arrangements at recycling centres
- Keeping our roads in good condition.

### Health and wellbeing:

- Tackling drug abuse and alcoholism
- Role of culture and leisure in keeping people healthy and active
- Leisure services to keep older people active
- How cultural services support younger people.



#### Finance:

- Salaries and pensions of senior managers and Councillors
- Level of cuts and the impact on residents
- Cost of the 'Balancing the Budget' consultation
- Making sure Council is spending on the right things
- How to protect key services whilst making savings.

The event was archived and will be available to view for six months and headings have been tabbed by speaker.

A total of 78 questions and comments were received in advance of the event and 21 questions and comments were received during the event.

The live audience totalled 346 and the average viewing time was 45 minutes. 692 people have viewed it post-event, with an average viewing time of 24 minutes.

The key themes raised during the event have been included in the analysis and reported in the main section of this document under the headings of 'Thriving People', 'Thriving Places' and 'Thriving Council'.



## Next steps

This report is being shared widely with elected Members and senior managers to help the Council shape its plans and budget. It will be formally presented to Cheshire West and Chester Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 24 January, followed by the Council's Cabinet on 7 February 2018, and Council on 1 March 2018. The report is publicly available on the Council's website and communications are underway to ensure these findings are widely shared.

## Consultation methods and responses

Consultation method	Description	Participation
Consultation booklet and questionnaire	A consultation document with accompanying questionnaire, setting out the Council's future Budget plans. The document and questionnaire were available online and in printed format. Printed copies were distributed widely to key locations, including libraries, leisure centres, children's centres and key Council buildings, as well as promotional postcards. Electronic copies were emailed via various distribution lists held by the Council and by partners. The consultation documents were also sent to the Council's Citizens' Panel, 'View West'.	305 questionnaires completed (201 paper returns, 104 online)
Interactive budget simulator (Delib®)	An online tool that simulates the Council's budget and the savings needed to be made. The tool allows participants to increase or decrease spending on services by moving 'sliders'. The consequences of their actions are revealed for them to see how changing spending affects service provision. Once participants have made their choices, they can 'submit' their budget with an explanation of their views.	300 completions (229 with demographics, 77 with comments)
Social media and email	The consultation had a dedicated website on the Council's website, and Twitter and Facebook were used, not only to raise awareness of the consultation, but as a way for people to feedback views. A dedicated hashtag was set up as well as a specific email address for people to use.	2,529 total views of budget page (1,017 unique page views)  Five Facebook posts, 34 Twitter posts, one LinkedIn post resulted in 112 retweets/shares

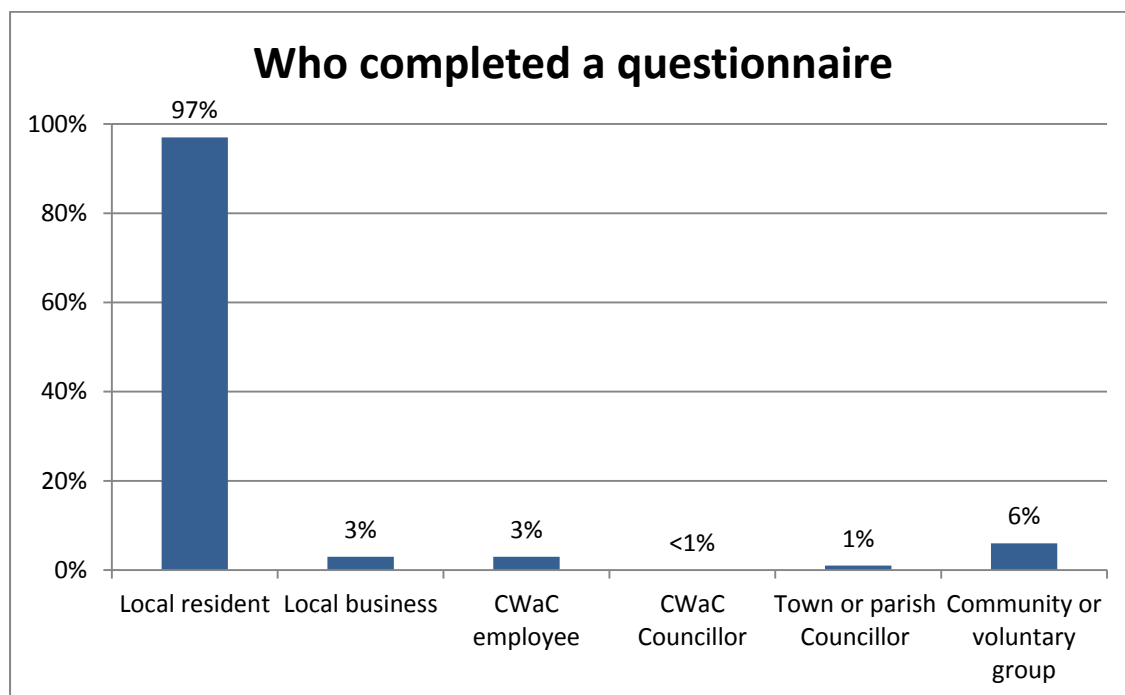


		(90 reactions) and (48 comments).
Press engagement and online advertising	Press releases and stories in local media, as well as online advertising via Facebook, targeting different groups and actions.	Three press releases and nine stories in local media  Five Facebook adverts reached 38,894 people (was seen 152,435 times, 96 comments, 56 reactions and 44 shares).
Online web event	An hour and a half live online debate was held on Wednesday 8 <sup>th</sup> November at the Lions Salt Works Museum, where a panel of Cabinet Members answered questions submitted by the public and a panel of residents. The debate was subsequently available to view on the Council's website throughout the remainder of the consultation.	346 live viewers and 692 'on demand'  78 questions and comments received in advance, 21 during the event
Distribution through existing networks	Proactive distribution to a wide variety of partners and interest groups via email and attendance at meetings.	Community and voluntary groups, Carers networks, partners, disability groups, faith groups, business networks, colleges, schools, Youth Senate, Health and Wellbeing Board, Adult Social Care network, local community meetings
Council staff/unions	Promoted at a meeting with Trade Unions and ensuring staff were aware of the consultation and encouraged to give their views.	Attendance at meetings and via email



## Who took part

Responses were received from a broad range of individuals and groups from across the Borough. The graph below shows that 97% of people who completed a questionnaire were a local resident, 3% a local business, 3% a CWaC employee, less than 1% a CWaC Councillor, 1% a Town or Parish Councillor and 6% were completing it on behalf of a community or voluntary group.



Note that totals do not equal 100 as people could choose more than one option  
Base for graph: 295

Local organisations who responded included:

Chester Sea Cadets  
Cheshire Centre for Independent Living  
Children in Care Council  
Dandys Ltd.  
Lostock Gramam Parish Council

## Communicating Balancing the Budget

### Background

Promotion of the consultation was important to ensure a positive response rate and that as many people as possible were encouraged and able to take part. It was also



important to ensure understanding of the consultation methods and supporting information.

A multi-method approach was used to publicise the consultation to reach and engage as many people as possible, including innovative methods to engage people via social media.

## Consultation launch

The following actions took place to promote the start of the consultation:

**Press release:** To help make sure that all residents were informed of the consultation, a press release was issued on 12 October to promote its launch, explain the background of the consultation and outline how people could take part. This was also published on the Council's Your West Cheshire website and was featured online by the Chester Chronicle, Northwich Guardian and AboutMyArea (Neston news) and in print by the Chester Chronicle, promoting how residents could take part in the consultation.

**Member Briefing:** This was issued to all Councillors to raise awareness of the consultation on 5 October, before the launch, to ensure Members were aware of the structure of the consultation and how to take part. This was also circulated to all Town and Parish Councils in the borough via ChALC and a news bulletin that is circulated to Cheshire West, Cheshire East and Warrington parish councils. This bulletin reaches 97 parish councils in Cheshire West and Chester, 107 in Cheshire East and 19 in Warrington.

**Keeping in-touch:** A message from the Chief Executive was issued to all Cheshire West and Chester Council staff on 16 October as part of the weekly Keeping in-touch bulletin. This encouraged members of staff to participate in and promote the consultation.

**Distributing printed copies of consultation materials:** Booklets, questionnaires and fliers were made available at numerous locations across the borough, including all libraries, BRIO Leisure venues, Customer Service points and children's centres. Materials were also displayed in some local community centres and businesses by the Localities teams, who also distributed documents to residents and interest groups via a range of channels, including community meetings/forums. Council staff also took information to scheduled meetings such as the Health and Wellbeing Board, Adult Social Care network, Children in Care Council and the Older People's Network.

**Electronic distribution:** The consultation was featured on the Council's website throughout the consultation. Council staff emailed links to the consultation via various distribution lists, which reached numerous individuals, including Town and Parish Councils, carers' networks, Third sector partners, disability groups, faith





groups, Clinical Commissioning Groups, Police, GP practices, housing providers, schools, voluntary groups, local residents groups and associations, and the business community. The consultation was also promoted via local newsletters and weekly bulletins.

The consultation was also distributed to the Council's Citizens' panel (a balanced group of residents that have volunteered to support consultations) either by post, or where possible, via email.

**Social media at launch:** Posts were published on Facebook and Twitter on the day of the launch, encouraging people to have their say and linking to the press release on Your West Cheshire for more information. The consultation was also promoted via local social media, including the Pride in the Port Facebook page

### Throughout the consultation

To ensure that we had a healthy response rate throughout the consultation and good engagement for the online event, the following actions were taken to promote the consultation on an ongoing basis:

**Organic social media:** Throughout the campaign, five organic posts were published on Facebook, 34 on Twitter and one on LinkedIn. This resulted in 112 retweets or shares and 90 likes. We received 48 inbound messages in response to our posts, with 33 via Twitter and 15 via Facebook.

**Advertising on social media:** A campaign was run of paid for posts on Facebook during the consultation period. This used five separate advertisements targeting different groups and actions with the key aims of promoting the budget simulator and the online event. The five advertisements in the Facebook cost-per-click campaign had a reach of 38,894 people and were seen 152,435 times.

**Videos:** We filmed a series of videos with Cabinet Members, giving each the chance to outline their service areas and the budget challenges they face. These were distributed via Twitter and urged people to submit questions for the online event and to take part in the consultation.

We also filmed a video about the consultation and distributed it via Twitter as part of #OurDay, the Local Government Association's annual tweetathon to promote the work of local government. This went live on 21 November and urged people to take part in the consultation in its final days.

**Website:** A series of dedicated consultation pages were hosted on the Council website. These featured links to the document, the easy read document, the online questionnaire, the budget simulator and ways to submit a question for the online event. This year, the pages featured a larger link to the budget simulator within a prominent green button. 'Balancing the Budget' featured on the homepage banner of



the Council website throughout the consultation, which linked directly to the dedicated consultation pages. The consultation was also promoted on local websites through the Locality teams, including CH64 About my Area, Malpas Online and Tattenhall Online websites.

**Press release:** We issued a press release on 1 November to promote the online event, encouraging people to submit their questions and to watch the event. This was also published on the Council's Your West Cheshire website and was published online by AboutMyArea, in print by the Northwich Guardian and was broadcast by Dee 106.3FM, promoting how residents can take part.

**Member Briefing:** A Member Briefing was issued on 2 November to promote the event, outlining its aims and format and how people could take part.

**Keeping intouch:** A message from the Chief Executive was issued to all staff on 6<sup>th</sup> November promoting the online event, outlining its format and its ability to encourage more digital interaction alongside more traditional consultation methods. It encouraged staff to submit their questions and to watch the event live or on catch up.

Following the online event, a further message was issued to all staff on 13 November to report how the event was received as well as to promote the final weeks of the consultation and the budget simulator.

**Agenda item at meetings:** The consultation was raised at various meetings, including the Health and Wellbeing Board, Adult Social Care Stakeholder Network, Older People's Network, Children in Care Council, Landlords Forum and Trade Unions. Localities teams also promoted the consultation at local community meetings with residents, town and parish council meetings and at schools. At these meetings, the consultation was either included as a specific agenda item to raise awareness, or the link was included for reference on the Agenda for information.

## Analysis and Impact

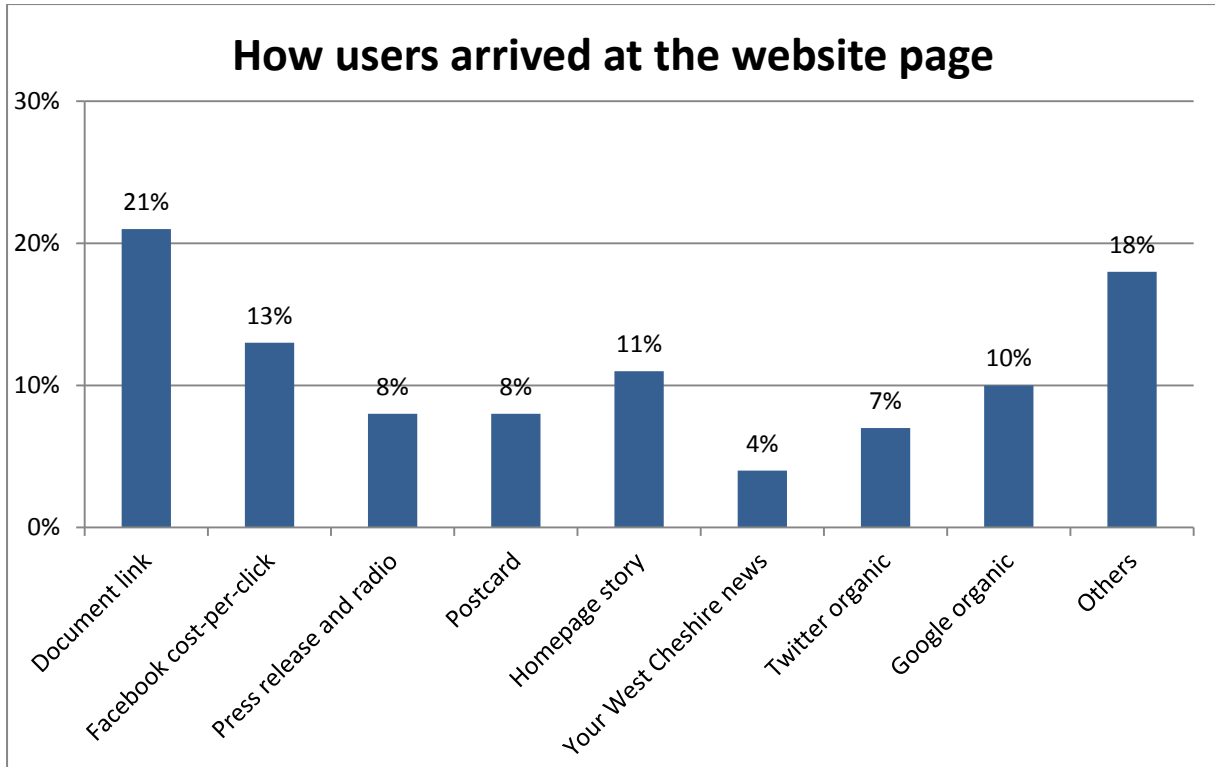
Based on this activity, we can report the following in terms of how people arrived at the consultation, and how many people were made aware of it.

**Website page:** Tracking how users arrived at the website page is vital to enable us to assess the effectiveness of our communications. This enables us to change some aspects of the campaign while it is live and provides data to inform future campaign strategies.

The page received a total of 1,017 unique views and 2,529 total views, with users spending an average of 36 seconds on the page. The graph below displays how users arrived at the webpage, showing that 21% followed the link on the consultation document, 13% accessed it using Facebook, 8% via radio or a press release, 8% followed the link on a postcard and 11% via the homepage story. In addition, 4%

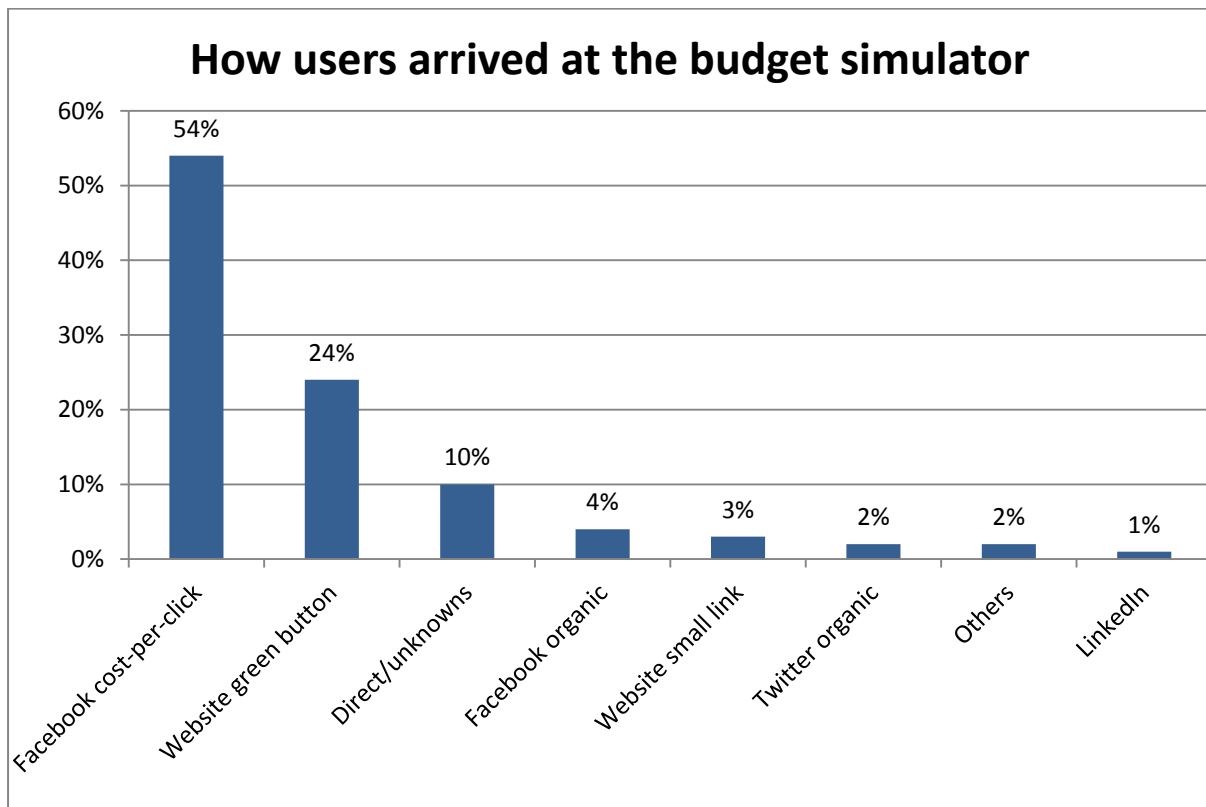


accessed it through Your West Cheshire news, 7% via Twitter, 10% used Google and 18% used other means.



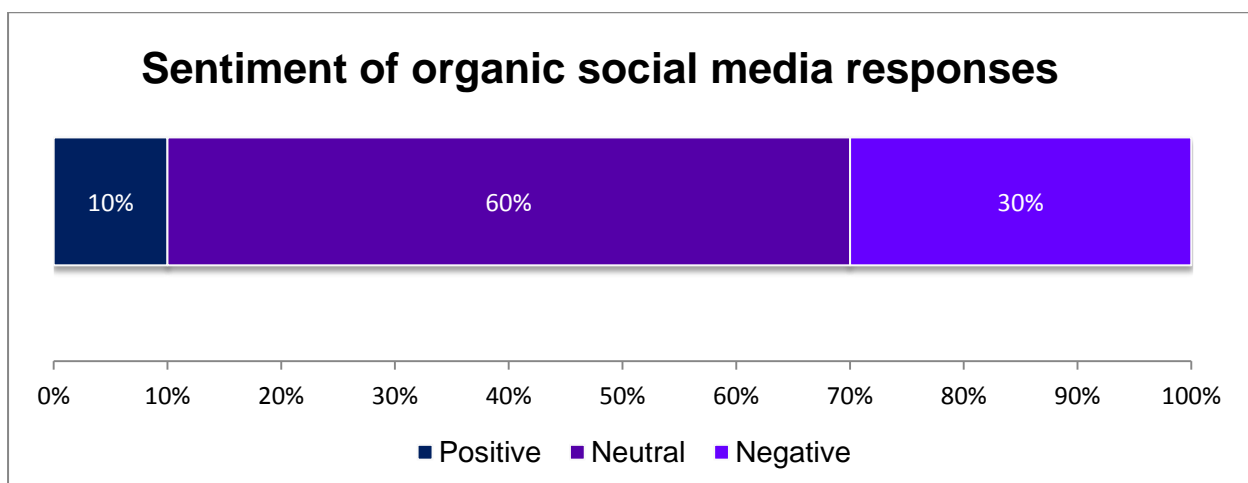
**Budget simulator:** A total of 2,335 were measured starting the process, with males more likely to complete at 71% compared to 29% females. The Facebook paid for (cost-per-click) campaign (54%) and the green button on the website page (24%) supplied the most conversions, followed by:

- Direct/unknowns – 10%
- Facebook organic – 4%
- Small link on the website – 3%
- Twitter organic – 2%
- LinkedIn – 1%
- Other means – 2%



**Organic social media:** Posts on Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn resulted in 112 retweets or shares and 90 likes. We received 48 inbound messages in response to our posts, with 33 via Twitter and 15 via Facebook. The majority of messages, 60% cent, were neutral, with 30% negative and 10% positive.

The feedback received via this method has been included in the 'Thriving People', 'Thriving Places' and 'Thriving Council' sections in this report.





**Advertising on social media:** The five advertisements in the Facebook cost-per-click campaign had a reach of 38,894 people and were seen 152,435 times. They received 1,538 clicks, 96 comments, 56 reactions and 44 shares.

**Twitter videos:** The nine videos with Cabinet members to promote the online event received a total of 25,400 impressions, which means 25,400 people had the opportunity to see the videos. The average number of impressions per video was 2,822, and they were viewed in total 6,291 times and generated 21 comments.

## Closing the consultation

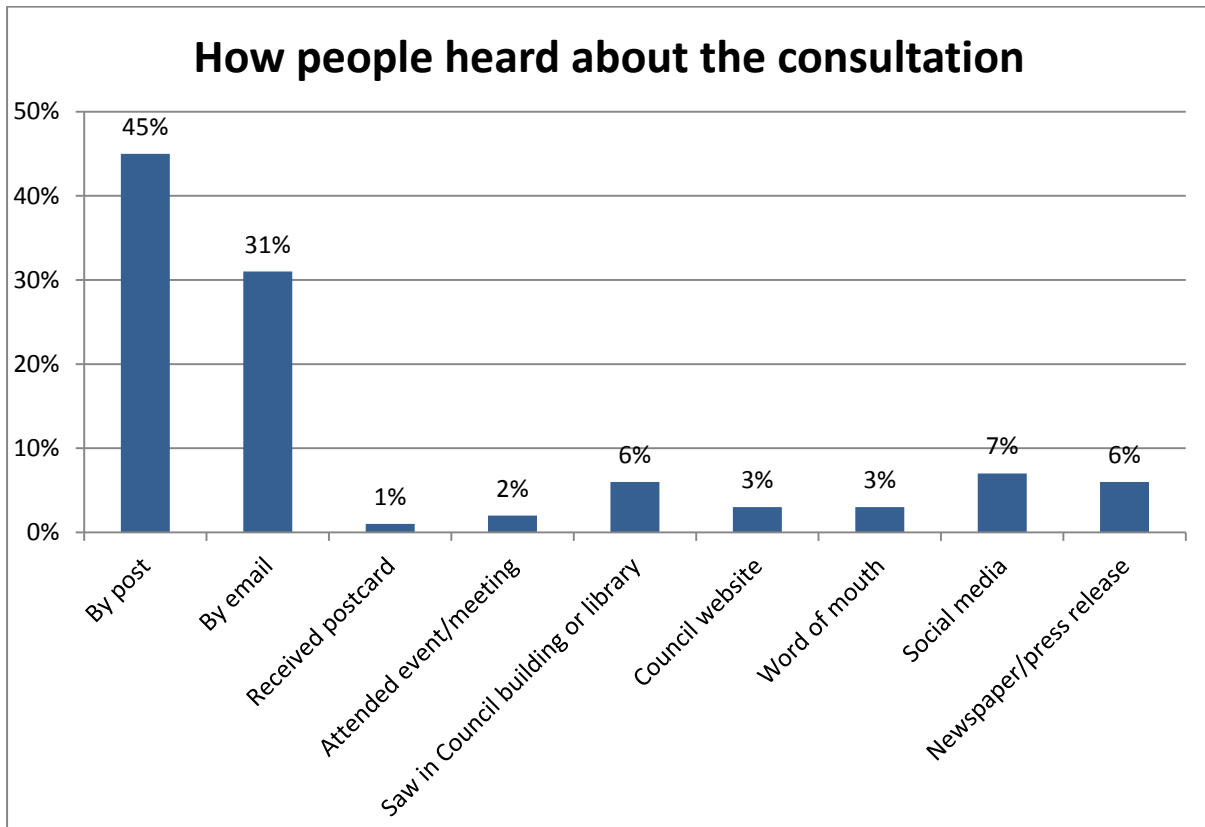
The following methods were used to close the consultation:

- A press release was issued on 29 November to thank the public for taking part, to outline initial engagement figures and to set out the next steps. This was covered online by So Cheshire and in print by the Northwich Guardian. All coverage was positive.
- A video was filmed with the Leader of the Council, Cllr Samantha Dixon, to announce the closing of the consultation, thank those who took part and outline next steps. This was distributed on Twitter.
- Thank you messages were sent to those who supported the event, including the three members of the residents' panel and the host, Mark Edwardson.

## How people found out about the consultation

The graph below shows how people heard about the consultation, based on the views of people filling in the questionnaire (either online or hardcopy). It shows the following percentages:

- By post – 45%
- By email – 31%
- Received a postcard – 1%
- Attended an event/meeting – 2%
- Saw it in a Council building or library – 6%
- Council website – 3%
- Word of mouth – 3%
- Social media – 7%
- Newspaper/press release – 6%



Note that totals do not equal 100 as people could choose more than one option  
 Base for graph: 425

### Cost of the consultation

The total cost of the consultation was almost £11,500. This can be broken down by:

- Budget simulator tool - £4,745
- Event - £1,360
- Printing, distribution and promotion - £5,370

### Accessing Cheshire West and Chester Council information and services.

Council information is also available in audio, braille, large print or other formats.

If you would like a copy in a different format, in another language or require a British Sign Language interpreter, please email us at:

[equalities@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk](mailto:equalities@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk)

Telephone: **0300 123 8 123**

Textphone: **18001 01606 275 757**

Email: [\*\*equalities@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk\*\*](mailto:equalities@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk)

Web: [\*\*www.cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk\*\*](http://www.cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk)