

Conservative Group Budget Amendment 26/27

Overview of the amendment

To provide one hour free parking in all council short term car parks, to reduce the garden waste subscription, to provide additional funding for planning enforcement and handyman services, whilst freezing council tax and increasing the future financial stability reserve over the course of the MTFS.

Amendment to recommendations of the report

Bullet 1	Add "as adjusted by the line items within the financials breakdown of this amendment"
Bullet 3	Delete from "£170.86" and replace with "£165.86, representing no change to the current charge"
Bullet 4	Add "as adjusted by the line items within the financials breakdown of this amendment"
Appendix 8	b)(i) replace £97,796,896 with £97,777,458 b)(ii) replace £75,587,303 with £75,905,963 b)(iii) replace £22,209,593 with £21,871,495 b)(iv) replace £328.45 with £323.45 b)(v) replace £170.86 with £165.86

Financials

The impact of these five proposals on the MTFS is £4.96m, calculated as follows:

	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30	4YR MTFS
Proposal 1: One hour free parking in all council short stay car parks	345,462	407,282	407,282	407,282	1,567,308
Proposal 2: Reduce Garden Waste Subscription by £10 pa		510,000	510,000	510,000	1,530,000
Proposal 3: Additional funding for Planning Enforcement	68,600	71,001	73,486	76,058	289,145
Proposal 4: Funding for Handyman scheme	50,000	51,750	53,561	55,436	210,747
Proposal 5: Freeze Council tax in 2026/27	338,098	340,526	342,956	345,385	1,366,965
Total Reduction in Income	802,160	1,380,559	1,387,285	1,394,161	4,964,165

It is proposed to fund this with the following amendments to the budget and MTFS which have an impact of reducing the overall MTFS requirement by £7.13m:

	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30	4YR MTFS
Reducing the general salary inflation assumption from 5% to 3.5%	(483,500)	(1,035,000)	(1,635,000)	(2,281,000)	(5,434,500)
Include One Leisure annual increases at 3%	-	(283,333)	(566,667)	(850,000)	(1,700,000)
Net Savings	(483,500)	(1,318,333)	(2,201,667)	(3,131,000)	(7,134,500)

The net effect of these proposals on the future financial stability reserve is as follows:

	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30
Future Financial Stability reserve b/f	1,000,000	2,042,569	3,365,343	4,604,724
Planned use of reserves per appendix 7	1,361,228	1,385,000	425,000	(1,906,000)
Net effect of this amendment	(318,660)	(62,226)	814,381	1,736,839
Future Financial Stability reserve C/f	2,042,569	3,365,343	4,604,724	4,435,563

Section 151 Officer S.25 Statement**Proposal 1 – One hour free parking**

These proposals present a number of direct and in-direct considerations (financial, practical and other). Changes in the agreed fee schedule would require a decision by the Executive, in addition to any Council decision on the budget framework; they also result in proposals that do come with costs. Most notably, there is considerable risk that following a formal order to introduce free parking, any subsequent reversal of this decision would be likely to result in a high degree of challenge and negativity, which in turn puts future income and ability to charge at risk in the future.

The proposals for reducing income received from car parking presents on balance a significant risk and challenges to the Revenue Budget and the delivery of services, placing potential ongoing reliance on support from reserves to balance an annual budget and MTFS. There is no consideration built into this proposal for mitigation of lost income or alternative proposals to replace the lost income; in my opinion this is not an appropriate or sustainable financial strategy and therefore could not support or recommend.

This proposal is not supported; but is ultimately a political decision.

Proposal 2 – Reduction of Garden Waste Subscription

The service continues to provide a value for money and cost-effective subscription service; current levels of activity and sign-ups remain strong, and the service continues to deliver when considered against local and CIPFA comparators. Garden Waste remains a discretionary service; the costs of which are met through the charges – despite those costs continuing to rise because of pressures relating to inflation, fuel costs, overheads, and staffing. Members should note that currently the % uptake in the district is high and on a par with other Councils and there is no evidence that we are aware of that would indicate that reducing the charge would increase uptake by an impactful level.

Given all the above factors, particularly the fact that this is a discretionary service and therefore should be charged on a full cost recovery basis, a reduction in charges would immediately put additional financial pressures on the revenue budget which would require service provision to be realigned, other sources of income to be uplifted or as a last resort for reserves to be used to fund the gap in funding created by the reduction in charge which is not in my opinion an appropriate or sustainable financial strategy and therefore could not support or recommend.

This proposal is not supported; but is ultimately a political decision.

Proposal 3 – Additional Budget for planning enforcement

Whilst additional service resources would always be welcomed; there is not considered to be a sound business need to relate to the introduction of additional posts within the service. Planning Enforcement is currently operating acceptably, and the backlog of cases has been addressed. Performance remains acceptable and broadly in comparison of others of a similar scale and geography. There have been some in-year challenges, but this is not uncommon within most services.

Members are responsible for setting the budget and the policy framework. It is not within the role of Members to direct the organisational structure of the authority or require the creation of specific posts. That is a matter reserved in law to the Head of Paid Service. Maintaining this distinction is important to ensure lawful decision-making and proper governance.

Under section 4(2) (b) – (d) of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989, responsibility of determining the number and grades of staff, the organisation of the authority's staff, and their appointment and management is a statutory function of the Head of Paid Service.

This is ultimately a political decision around priorities.

Proposal 4 – Additional Funding for Handyman Service

There is already a budget-line for the handyman service; whereby HDC contributes to AgeUK to operate the service. The service delivers low level timely interventions such as minor housing repairs and maintenance services, hospital discharge service, checks around the home (such as energy, fire and security) and first contact and signposting to other services. It helps people in crisis and prevents people escalating into crisis.

The service is provided at a low cost to people who tend to be mainly owner occupiers or private sector tenants (who make up approximately 85% of the county's householders) basically people pay for the "parts", and the "labour" costs are funded from the Council's funding.

This existing contract is due to end on 31st March 2026 with all partners (except County) agreeing to funding for a new 3-year contract to 31st March 2029.

The service would welcome this proposal as a way to progress discussions with Age UK and other affected Council's to see whether this could continue without County funding; this service is highly regarded across the region. At the very least it may enable us to contract with Age UK direct to deliver the service for our residents even if a small charge for labour needs to be levied to the householder to make it work. We note ongoing discussions with the County Council have confirmed that they have given a four-month extension to work through possible scenarios.

It does however constitute a discretionary service. It could most likely be offset by in year efficiency savings due to the modest overall increase to existing budget.

This is ultimately a political decision around priorities; financially the increase would have no material effect on the overall budget position.

Proposal 5 – Freezing Council Tax

Freezing the Council Tax charge at the 2025/26 level of £165.86, rather than increasing it to £170.86 for 2026/27 would reduce income in 2026/27 by £338,098.

Across the MTFS period, this loss compounds each year due to the anticipated growth in the council tax base. The total loss of income across 2026/27 and the MTFS would be £1,366,965.

Given the challenging economic climate, particularly within Local Government and reductions in core spending power, the loss of this income both in-year, and most importantly on a compound basis moving forward would have significant implications in later years. This would put additional financial pressures on the revenue budget which would require service provision to be realigned, other sources of income to be uplifted or as a last resort for reserves to be used to fund the gap in funding created by the reduction in charge which is not in my opinion an appropriate or sustainable financial strategy and therefore could not support or recommend.

This proposal is not supported.

Comments on savings:

An annual uplift in fees for One Leisure for the period of the MTFP would raise an estimated additional £1.7m in total – a 3% increase is considered to be reasonable based on market knowledge. Fees and Charges are

reviewed annually, agreed and approved by Cabinet as the decision to change fees and charges sits within the Executive. **This proposal is supported.**

Whilst the 3.5% general salary reduction proposed is ultimately a political decision around priorities, I believe that the current inclusion of a 5% provision is prudent and proportionate to support the ongoing outcomes and objectives agreed within the Workforce Strategy as the policy framework, and provides the appropriate level of funding provision to accommodate NJC pay award based on previous outcomes and any in-year pressures resulting from market forces. **This proposal is not supported.**

Date

23/02/2026