

Budget consultation survey results

Background

Following the agreement of the Policy and Resources Committee on 29 November, a consultation was launched on draft proposals for the council's budget for the financial year 2024/25.

This consultation ran for 5 weeks, and responses were encouraged through news release, social media posts, and the council website.

There were:

- 453 views of the consultation page on the council's website
- Social media activity promoting the consultation reached 2,078 people

The consultation asked people to read key budget documents and then respond to 17 questions.

The consultation closed at 5pm on Tuesday 3 January, having received 12 responses, and a letter was also received from Citizens Advice Swale.

Comments were also received from the Parking Policy consultation, which are reported on here.

Results – Summary

The results contained a lot of suggestions that are not within the control of Swale Borough Council, but instead fall to other agencies such as Kent County Council or the police. This sadly reduces the level of response further.

Section 1 – Draft Budget

Q1

The council needs to prepare a balanced budget so that its costs are met by income. The council intends to increase its income. How would you suggest we might do that?

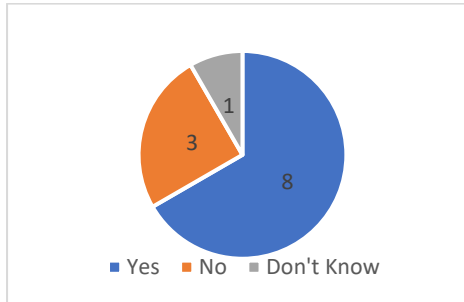
There were 10 responses to this question, with very little in the way of strong themes coming through:

- 4 respondents suggested increasing fines for FPNs and/or parking breaches.
- 2 respondents suggested that parking fees should be reduced.
- 2 respondents suggested increasing parking income through new fees for overnight parking of motorhomes, increasing EV charging prices, and increasing general traffic regulations and road markings.
- 2 respondents suggested increasing fees in relation to new housing developments.
- Other suggestions included:
 - Renting out Swale House
 - Filling empty commercial units, such as Bourne Place
 - Increasing leisure centre and swimming pool fees
 - Using own properties for temporary accommodation
 - Chargeable events/concerts
 - Increasing taxi and gambling licence fees

- Reducing toilet opening times and attendants
- Reducing fees and charges to increase demand
- Making further efficiencies
- Increasing Council Tax

Q2

Do you believe the council should reduce its spending?

**Q3**

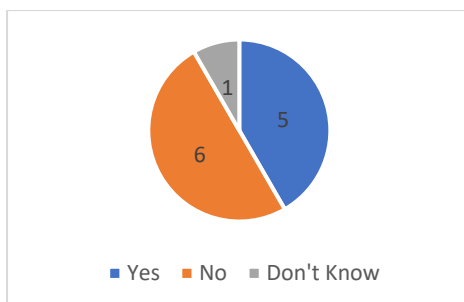
Which services would you reduce?

There were nine responses to this question:

- 4 made suggestions to reduce costs in temporary accommodation
- Other suggestions included:
 - Reducing verge maintenance
 - Freezing/reducing salaries of top earners
 - Reducing corporate costs and Member allowances
 - Reducing spend on climate and ecological emergency
 - Ensure assets are used to the end of their lives

Q4

Do you believe the council should reduce its spending on some services to be able to spend more on others?

**Q5**

Which services would you reduce spending on, and which services would you spend more on?

There were eight responses to this question:

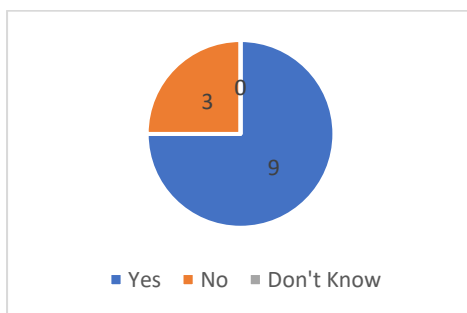
- Suggestions for increased spending included:

- Prevention of illegal dumping, building more council houses, supporting local third parties who provide essential support.
- Suggestions for reducing spending included:
 - Grounds maintenance, grants, cycle routes or any net zero/green agenda projects, council tax collection, and temporary accommodation.
- Other comments included:
 - Review of all services for efficiencies, consider mergers with other councils, not reducing hours of operation.

Section 2 – Proposed Fees & Charges

Q6

Do you agree that we should recover the costs of a service through the fees and charges for that service wherever possible?



Q7

Please use the box below to let us have any views on the proposed increases to the fees and charges.

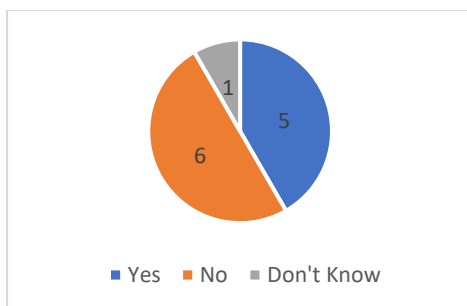
There were nine responses to this question, including:

- 4 disagreeing with the parking charge proposals
- 4 agreeing with increased fees for services where appropriate (discretionary services, FPNs, planning applications for 3+ homes, licence fees)

Section 3 – Proposed Parking Fees & Charges

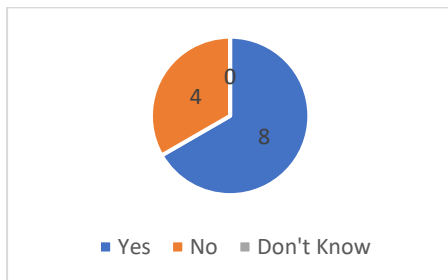
Q8

Do you agree with the proposal to have hourly charging during the day and a set overnight fee?



Q9

Do you believe that a charge should be made for motorcycle parking?

**Q10**

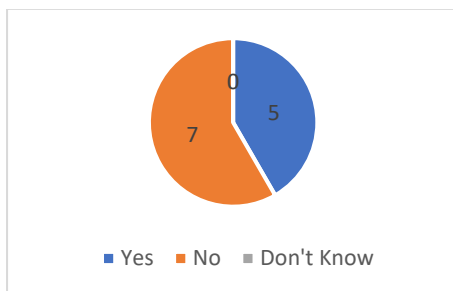
Please use the text box below to let us have any other views on the proposed increases to the parking fees and charges.

There were 10 responses to this question:

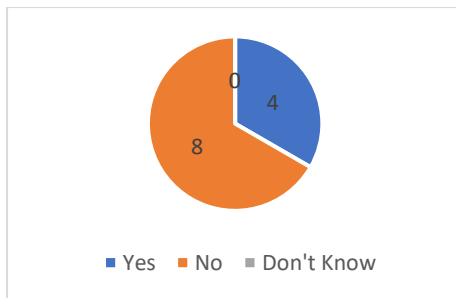
- 5 respondents were against night time parking charges, whilst 1 was in favour of, but felt this should start at 6pm
- 2 respondents were opposed to motorcycle charging
- 2 respondents felt that users should pay their fair share
- 2 respondents felt parking fees were proportionate, or could be increased.

Section 4 – Proposed Council Tax Level**Q11**

The Band D Council Tax for Swale Council for this year is £194.94 and the suggested increase for 2024/25 is £5.76. In the current financial circumstances do you think that this is an appropriate amount to charge?

**Q12**

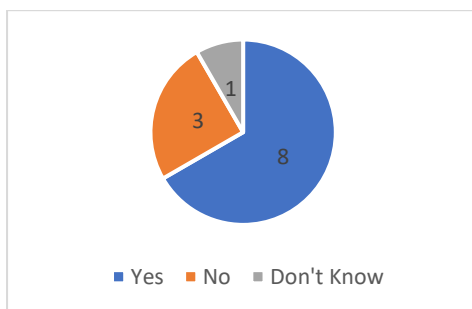
If the government gave us more flexibility to increase the charge beyond 2.99% to help support the council's budget would you be supportive?



Section 5 – Council Tax Discounts

Q13

Do you agree that these discounts (uninhabitable properties, and short term empty & unfurnished properties) should be removed?



Q14

Please use the text box below to let us have any views on this proposal.

There were 11 responses to this question:

- 8 respondents agree to removing or reducing the discount for short term empty properties, with some exceptions such as probate delays
- 5 respondents agree to removing the discount for uninhabitable properties, or having a limit on how long such a discount would be applied
- 1 respondent felt both discounts should be kept, and another that the uninhabitable discount should remain
- 3 respondents felt that Council Tax should be increased on empty homes
- 2 respondents felt this could be an incentive to bring empty homes into use.

Section 6 – Capital Spending Plans

Q15

Please use the box below to let us have any views on the capital programme proposals.

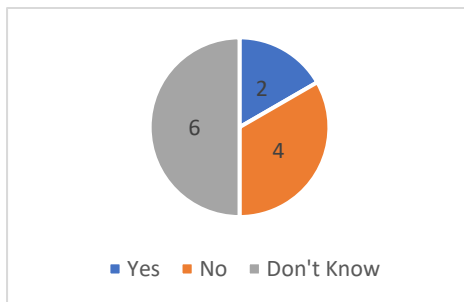
There were six responses to this question:

- 2 comments suggested only urgent projects should be considered whilst the funding generally is limited
- 2 respondents were supportive of the capital programme
- 1 respondent was happy for the council to borrow to build council housing
- 1 respondent felt there should be a longer term view, such as purchasing more properties for temporary accommodation beyond 2024/25.

Section 7 – Future Savings Options

Q16

Do you agree with the savings proposals outlined in the report?



Q17

Please use the box below to let us have any views on the savings proposals.

There were nine responses to this question, with a range of views, including:

- Services should be unaffected by savings
- Concern about cuts to voluntary organisations
- Running down reserves is not sensible
- Reduce spend on environmental issues and regeneration
- Leverage the private sector
- Purchase houses to use for temporary accommodation
- Assist customers who lack digital skills to reduce admin costs in the long term.

Results – Detailed

The responses from each free text question are set out below.

Q1

The council needs to prepare a balanced budget so that its costs are met by income. The council intends to increase its income. How would you suggest we might do that?

There were 10 responses to this question.

Suggestions were:

- Encourage people into the town rather than driving them away. An increase in parking costs has a detrimental effect on footfall, not the desired one. Short term gain, long term loss springs to mind. Ensure people can actually get to the town, traffic has been appalling. All shopping this year has been done online.

- Increase fines for offences & offenders which cost the council time and money to clear up and look to reduce costs and overheads for buildings and transport. Fees and costs should also be raised for new developments / developers looking to build in the area and fines should be levied against contractors who fail to complete planned works on time / to the requisite standard that lasts.
- Increase charges for leisure centre and swimming pool use. Increase penalties for fly-tipping.
- Increase the cost of statutory services such as those relating to property improvement.
- Make further savings and efficiencies residents cannot afford to pay increasing council tax.
- Stop paying bonuses to those at the top. Stop paying travel expenses. Cut back on paying out for useless ideas like 20 zones now cycle routes.
- Rent out empty space in Swale House, fill the empty units at Bourne Place, reduce the opening time and attendance at public conveniences, advertise more opportunities for concessions, increase Council Tax and fees and charges.
- Review all council house rents to bring them more in line with commercial rents. Too much incentive to stay in a council house even when families earn significant money. (Just look at Union Leaders on £100k+ still occupying council houses)
Create motorhome stopping areas in car parks charging an overnight fee.
Increase EV charging prices so that a clear profit is made.
The level of economically inactive people is shocking and more so those that have never had a job. Actively provide agency services for those people to work from home.
Get commercial companies to help with recycling sites so that you make money from the materials particularly metal but also hardcore etc)
Own your own accommodation for TA housing.
Remove parking charges and enforcement in most areas. Overall it is normally only good for the contractors. For illegal parking push that back to the Police.
Actively pursue illegal dumping of large quantities of overburden. Agree with Environment Agency that landfill tax payable is yours. Big money potentially.
Learn to create interesting car and motorcycle routes like Scotlands NC500 bringing tourism in. Put on events like the Bromley Pageant on Council land where you get a share of the gate fees. These can be big events.
- Increasing fines for offences such as fly tipping, any other environmental FPN's and parking breaches could be one way. Housing development companies could pay an increased amount for each development that is created towards the costs of services that will be provided by the council and later via council tax to those residents once properties are built. General traffic regulation and road makings etc could be significantly be increased compared to current proposals, these figures seem lower increases compared to other areas where costs are looking to be increased .
Wheeled bins for any new housing developments could be increased further as currently set to rise by 5.87% on average. Some increases to taxi licences and gambling licensing could be proposed as currently no increases planned ,when even a small 2 or 3 % could raise essential funds.
- External grants such as big lottery, potentially reduce some fees and charges to increase demand and thus increase income.

Q3

Which services would you reduce?

- Top earners salary frozen. Reduce verge maintenance to help biodiversity. Stop paying 4 traffic wardens to act like vultures around the town.
- Chief executive does not need a salary more than 15x the average UK household (£32k pa average). This should be reduced for starters. The council also needs to look at reducing its spending in the temporary accommodation sector which has one of the largest outgoings compared to income.
- Housing, corporate services, councillor's allowances.
- Those stated above.
- Communications, Climate & Ecological Emergency, Economic Development, Community Development, Customer Services.
- Do not buy new refuse vehicles. Best environmental solution is to use existing to the end of their lives. If you must have electric convert them. If you do own the fleet then ensure contractor liable for damage/misuse.
Cut all inclusion and diversity roles and operations. Reduce HR to one person per 100 employees. Reduce sickness absence and the game of ill health retirement. Move all new staff on money purchase pension schemes rather than final salary. Ensure all office based staff work in the office and certainly not remotely or overseas. Reduce air quality monitoring consultant costs by extending testing cycle. Only monitor where there is an alert and move other locations to 5 yearly. Cease the use of B&B but utilise ex military barracks as accommodation. Incentivises people to help themselves.
Do not sell any council properties and if challenged on the right to buy then increase the valuations by the enterprise value of the property.
Cease the use of taxis to take kids to school. Issue bicycles instead on cost and health grounds.
Cease maintaining council houses and make it a condition of rental. After the stories in the news make sure all residents have an obligation to avoid mold. It is not difficult by airing the room, bleach and anti mold paint.
Cease the use of consultants. They are expensive and normally only tell you what you already know.
Introduce a roving pothole repair team which should reduce the cost of damage to vehicles.
Reduced hours without reduced costs is disgraceful when services are poor.
Have a rates scheme for charities. They often compete with other shops and drag down the image of high streets.
Cut money to the police. They have become bloated and inefficient.
- Temporary accommodation, as there are many empty properties in the borough that could be purchased and used rather than outsourcing. Could street cleansing be done less often as a way to cut some costs?
- Members ICT allowance and expenses.
- Non statutory services, move the 11 TA cases older than 2 year into their own property.

Q5

Which services would you reduce spending on, and which services would you spend more on?

- Reduction in ground maintenance to increase biodiversity. Increase in waste management to stop illegal dumping of rubbish that is having a huge negative impact on the streets.

- I think there needs to be a top to tail review of all services being provided to see what efficiencies and cuts can be made to balance the books before any talk of spending on other services is considered.
- I think you should build more council housing. Stop cutting your staff and stop reducing hours of operation for help to residents, for example in housing options. Do not cut your support of the voluntary sector locally.
- Statutory services should be ringfenced but further merge with other councils should be considered. All other services including grants should be reduced.
- Cycle routes and use the money to repair the already damaged roads.
- Any new projects associated with Net Zero and the green agenda. Note it is neither a climate crisis (read Unsettled by Steven N Koonan) nor ecological crisis but we do need to be mindful of both climate and ecology.
All social services should be questioned to run at the minimum with exception of physically verifiably disabled and the elderly. Too many people are gaming the system now.
Absolutely no new active travel schemes. They are costly, little used and drive business away from the area. Many are being removed elsewhere in the country. It is amazing how many zealots have polluting battery powered bicycles and do not get healthier as they are effectively electric motorcycles!
- Cut costs on council tax collection by more pro active education with residents of local support available and also of benefit schemes, acknowledging that many people can't or don't access the internet so need help with forms. Temporary housing could be less if bought properties in the borough to reduce costs of statutory provision. Maintain or increase expenditure to local 3rd parties who provide essential support to many people in the area which helps improve wellbeing and social/economic environment.
- Would need more detail to be able to answer.

Q7

Please use the box below to let us have any views on the proposed increases to the fees and charges.

- No to parking, enough is enough, you have raised prices to justify wages of wardens and it is a revenue making scheme to punish residents (and customers!) in an already failing High Street. Don't aim at individual planning applications, House builders are making Huge profits, look at any planning applications with excess of 3 dwellings and increase fees with this.
- Any service which costs the council money but which is not a necessity should have its fees increased in line with inflation. For fixed penalties and fines these should be increased more than the rate of inflation, more aggressively pursued to not only cover the council costs but also to provide additional as compensation to help run other services which were previously cut.
- By increasing the cost of discretionary fees and charges it passes the cost to those who can afford to pay more.
- Dependent on cost benefit analysis and Quails.
- How long do you think the working class can continue to pay these increases. Manage our money wisely and listen to what the people want.

- You have become addicted to parking money. You need to do a complete review looking at doing away with the lot. Remove parking costs and enforcement people keeping a tiny team for enforcement of abuse. You will probably find overall you will make money. Many of the fees you levy have a negative effect on commerce and those living in Swale particularly if they are already economically vulnerable.
- Some increase do seem fairer than others, but is it possible to increase further some costs like taxi and gambling licences where currently no increases. Further increases for further environmental FPN's and fly tipping etc as these must reflect the costs involved to then collect rubbish dumped and impact on staffing costs involved to administer these areas.
- Evening and overnight charges for car parking should be cancelled and revert back to the daytime 8am-6pm core peak day time hours. The revenue already collected from car parking far exceeds the cost and maintenance charges to provide this service. The proposed overnight fixed charge should not be introduced. An example of disproportionate costs includes - to park for 1.5 hours from 6:00 to 7:30 would cost £4.30 (overnight £3 plus 1 hour from 6pm to 7pm). In addition - charging for all motorcycles and some car parks by cashless payment options only, actively discriminates against members of the community that cannot pay by electronic means. If you do not have a smart/mobile phone - you are excluded from using those facilities. To promote more use of local services and support businesses, I would also suggest making the first half hour of any stay, free of charge.
- Do not agree with night time parking fees. Have you considered reducing some fees to increase demand and bring in more income.

Q10

Please use the text box below to let us have any other views on the proposed increases to the parking fees and charges.

- I agree with the overnight proposals but should start from 6pm. No for charging for motorcycles, we should be encouraging light traffic no penalising.
- Parking charges even on the new fee structure are proportionate for now. When they start to become disproportionate is when there will be an issue.
- Do not give free parking to electric vehicles. Also no free electricity.
- Those using their cars should pay their fair share of the costs.
- Evening charges harms towns' economy, further increase in parking will see a reduction in income.
- By having night charges you are reducing footfall to towns, businesses close. Stop being so greedy.
- Are you insane?!! Motorcycles are the best solution for the environment and congestion rather than 2 tonne EVs. Introducing night charges for parking will kill evening visits to places like Faversham stone dead. As above, car park charges should be removed and all the machines and unhappiness that goes with them and their running costs. Instead perhaps test some of the new PV systems for roads to generate electricity income.
- The costs for travelodge stayers is very low compared to other areas where this service is provided and could be increased to match similar other charges by local authorities. Will any increase impact on people shopping in the towns ?
- Evening and overnight charges for car parking should be cancelled and revert back to the daytime 8am-6pm core peak day time hours. The revenue already collected from car parking far exceeds the cost and maintenance charges to provide this

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- I do not support charges after 6pm especially as cars are the only options a the busses stop at 7 or earlier in my case at 5pm.

Q14

Please use the text box below to let us have any views on this proposal.

- Both should be short term, up to a maximum of 4 months. Don't remove, just shorted the benefit.
- I think it's a good idea. I would also suggest additional council tax increases for those who have more than 1 property (especially if it's for rental / buy to let purposes).
- I agree with removing discount for short term empty properties but how an you charge council tax for a property which is uninhabitable? It's not logical.
- It will encourage landlords to make sure they provide property that will reduce the under capacity in the rental market.
- This proposal requires practical application to work.
- Just because they are empty doesn't mean they shouldn't pay.
- It depends if the property is empty due to a death that is going through probate / in the process of being sold - I think there should still be an exemption for this.
- It is a difficult one as some people again are playing the system allowing properties to fall into disrepair and then catch light to make money whereas some are genuine reasons. Will create a new enforcement game of when you get to know somewhere is empty. You might wish to double council taxes on properties that are commercial lets all year. Coastal properties are often empty most of the year.
- Offering incentives to those with empty properties to purchase them could be a possibility and reduce expenditure on temporary housing budget too.
- If properties are either uninhabitable, or are short term empty and unfurnished, they are not using any facilities provided by the Council. Why should they have to pay anything?
- you should charge double for every year these properties are kept empty and land banked

Q15

Please use the box below to let us have any views on the capital programme proposals.

- Each has its own merit and any that are required should go a head to reduce overspend in following years.
- Unless these are urgent for healthcare, policing or fire safety, everything else should be put on hold unless absolutely critical until the books are balanced and more urgent services prioritised for funding.
- I do not know the details but am happy for you to borrow in order to build council housing.
- I have no comment on the capital budget.

- A number of councils have undertaken this approach, interest rates may not further decrease, capital receipts are dependent on sales, reserves are finite and decreasing.
- If you do not have the money then all should stop without a clear business benefit case. The refuse truck purchase seems mad at a time of short funds so I do hope the case is sound. You should work assets for as long as possible which is also the most environmentally beneficial thing to do.
- you need more of a longer term view. ie more TA properties beyond 24/25 what new parks and sports ground to impact environmental schemes

Q17

Please use the box below to let us have any views on the savings proposals.

- It is leadership's responsibility to ensure these are deliverable without affecting service. Swale has seen a huge increase in residential properties without an increase in infrastructure. Most of these new estates have management fees so where is all the money?!?!
- There is no detail in the budget report about exactly which services will be cut and by how much. I am worried about cuts to voluntary agencies, who do a great job for the borough and save you a lot of money by providing public services.
- Reducing the contribution to some in the charitable sector will cost the council money in the long run. The contribution to Citizens Advice results in more value to Swale BC than the actual cost of the subsidy.
- These proposals are not sufficient.
- You seem to waste tax payers money for idiotic ideas that no one wants.
- Running reserves down is not sensible. Need to stop nearly all the environmental spends. Reduce the spend on regeneration but leverage the private sector.
- Savings could be made by purchasing own housing stock to reduce temp housing costs. Assisting more people with non digital skills to complete forms which would increase their income, reduce monies owed to SBC and subsequently reduce admin costs associated with chasing up monies owed.
- Please see previous comments around new car park charges introduced for 2023/24 and proposed for 2024/25.
- not enough detail to answer but generally in support.

Response from Citizens Advice Swale

Introduction

We are writing to SBC members to ask you to consider your critical contribution to our service and to look again at the impact your proposed cuts in funding will have on what we can deliver to Swale residents.

We are grateful to Swale Borough Council for its unwavering support over the years. We understand that setting the budget for 2024/5 has been an immense challenge and you

have not taken the decisions lightly.

Nonetheless, it is our public service duty to provide all members with a detailed explanation about how our work supports statutory services, and the potential domino effect should we be unable to sustain our core organisation and general services, from which the majority of our project work derives.

Citizens Advice delivers a return on SBCs investment

It is fair to say that in recent years Citizens Advice Swale (CAS) has become akin to a fourth emergency service. The 'wrap around' support we offer is second to none. SBC' contribution is an investment from which we deliver demonstrable returns.. The social, health and financial burdens of the last few years have taken their toll on Swale's citizens: CAS provides them with the tools to help themselves and help them keep their heads above water. We keep people in their homes, we ensure basic needs are met, we encourage self help and educate people about how to better manage money and pay liabilities. We increase residents' incomes, we support people to stay in work. The combined impact of our advice services on health and wellbeing is palpable

In the last financial year we supported 3012 unique clients with 17505 Issues. Of these 9740 were related to debt and benefits and 1567 were related to housing. 61% of clients were disabled or registered as having a long term health condition. We produced a total income gain of £795,496.70 for residents. Per resident this equates to on average £264 per client.

As 2023 went on, demand grew, the issues clients faced became more complex and inter-related and we now find ourselves significantly under-resourced. Currently there is a four week wait for debt appointments and only 10% of calls are answered via our Adviceline. Despite this challenge the quality of our service remains gold standard. As a local citizens advice office we have external accreditations for both debt and welfare benefits, we have met all our quality requirements for generalist advice and recently passed our three year audit with a glowing report. This is testament to the dedication of staff who are dealing with more and more vulnerable, complex cases and working harder and harder to meet the needs of our clients. How SBC's contribution to CAS makes a difference

In 2023-24 we received a grant of £133,000 from Swale Borough Council. It is of course not our only source of funding but the contribution represents an essential support for our core costs which can be difficult to cover from project based funding.

A limited breakdown of these costs for a typical year shows: £58,000 towards rent, utilities, IT and other office overheads. The rest of the grant broadly covers a proportion of our overall salary cost. The £133,000 received also allowed us to generate over £300,000 in additional income. This income was majoritively project based. It gave us the ability to expand services on the island, work more closely with food banks and local authority and support a large number of residents in severe deprivation

What we can offer

In terms of the value your money provides to local residents, the figures for 2022/23 are astounding. These figures are produced by our national body and are credible and conservative. The financial value is a minimum return on the value of Citizens Advice . Every £1 invested into our organisation is worth £21.62 in public value and £3.65 in fiscal value. Our services save the NHS £224,390 per year by reducing use. We've saved the DWP £672,429 by keeping people in work . The total value to the people we help is an astonishing £5,425,520 and the total public value is £9,744,500. Regarding the local authority's statutory duty Swale Citizens Advice has saved £188, 568 in preventing homelessness, housing eviction and in council tax repayments

The consequences of a cut in funding

As noted above, SBC's contribution pays for our core overheads and salaries for key members of staff who are essential in our ability to generate further funds. It gives CAS the financial stability it needs in order to plan for the future, develop and fundraise. If we were unable to secure replacement funding within the next 3 months our service would have to shrink to minimal levels. Based on our current draft budget, and the proposed cut to our grant, we would need to reduce face to face services to a single location, with much reduced hours and make multiple redundancies. The majority of our project work would be at risk as would potentially 75% of our admin staff, 70% of supervision, and we would be unable to continue to provide welfare benefits support. The cuts in supervision would compromise our ability to provide multi channel access to our services. Our debt project would also need to be shut down: This service operates on referral from our general service which would no longer generate enough referrals for us to meet necessary targets or manage audit requirements. In addition, we would lose our capacity to develop, grow or look for future investment. It would be a skeleton ship offering the bare minimum in the face of increasing demand.

Handling the risks whilst developing services and staff

Given this potentially bleak scenario, CAS has not been complacent. We have escalated our fundraising strategy, exploring all alternative streams of income that can sustain our services. Grant funding is a challenge. Aside from the fierce competition that all charities face, our specific difficulty is that because our service is open to everybody and not targeted at specific sections of the community, CAS is excluded from applying to many of the grant bodies that offer support for core costs. Nonetheless, we have invested in our staff, developing our fundraising skills, and fostered a culture of innovation and learning. introduced a more systematic process for tracking opportunities and submitted many more grants in 23/4 than in previous years. Application processes are, however, lengthy and we are unlikely to have confirmation from the more significant grants for at least 3 months, which adds to the urgency of our current situation. We have also placed a high emphasis on volunteer recruitment to try and bridge the gap between resource and demand. In short, we have done everything we can to mitigate the risks we face, short of making direct cuts to services.

We recently expanded our services back onto the Isle of Sheppey and now offer face to face debt and generalist advice on a weekly basis. Our newly secured energy project looks like it will enable us to enhance this presence further and we had hoped to offer sessions in both Minster and Leysdown from the Spring. We have been active participants at networking events and are regular contributors to the cost of living groups and One Swale roadshows in an attempt to access harder to reach groups and highlight how we can support marginalised groups further. The current year's funding has allowed us to respond to changing needs and work more closely with partner organisations. This has proved to be an extremely positive experience

We hope SBC will reconsider their grant funding proposals and maintain their contribution to our service at 23/24 levels. This would offer a lifeline and an opportunity for CAS to redouble efforts to secure longer term sustainability and make the necessary organisational changes that will secure our continuity. Crucially it would allow us to continue to provide our services to local residents through what has been a period of immense difficulty for many. It would alleviate the pressures faced by local councils and would support them in meeting their statutory duties. It would make the world of difference to some of Swale's most vulnerable households.

Some testimonies from local residents

Recent feedback provided by clients helps demonstrate the difference we make to people's lives:

I cannot thank you all enough, the Advice that I was given and the subsequent actions have actually been life changing for myself and my three sons Ten out of ten and gratitude to you ...my fragile mental health has improved as now I have hope and can look forward to a better life for my family. Cannot thank you enough.

I'll never be able to thank Citizens Advice enough, especially Tracy and her team in Faversham, as well as your Super Advisers at Head Office. I hate to think where my 2 kids and I would be, without their fantastic knowledge, advice and invaluable support

I cannot thank my advisor enough for all that he did for me in such difficult times. I feel at the lowest point of my life he saved me. Guided me through every step and advised me throughout each process of what to expect and how to keep going. He was absolutely sensational at his job... without him... we wouldn't be settled now and doing ok today. Professionalism at its best. Thank you so very very much.

I admire these people who volunteer their time to help people who are having problems. I particularly warmed to the lady who was training as she showed great empathy and seemed aware I wasn't someone just scrounging off the state. I worked til covid started but now at 73 my job no longer exists and in any case my mobility is becoming a problem. My savings have gone and I wanted help re housing benefit in relation to the room I rent

No complaints. Quite the opposite. I was impressed with the service. Great advice, brilliant help. Without which I wouldn't be where I am now.

Fiona Spall & Jude Lee (Interim Chief Officers)
Sarah Harvey (Chair of Trustees)

Citizens Advice Swale

Parking Consultation – Comments Received

A consultation on the parking policy was undertaken alongside the budget consultation, and 23 comments were received relating to fees and charges, 5 comments regarding charging for motorcycles, and 1 comment regarding charging for motorhomes. The comments are detailed below.

- Reduced fee after 6pm (Bourne Place) for those using the cinema complex, etc on weekdays.
- The charges for evening parking, especially Faversham, are appalling. It heavily impacts on social and hospitality businesses who are already struggling.
- The waiting time at minor injuries is often in excess of an hour, putting a cost on families already struggling.
- Families are finding the cost prohibitive for the swimming pool, and is adding a horrific cost to members of the swimming club.
- I would be interested to know how much revenue has been generated, against how much will be lost in business rates if just 2 businesses close.
- Night Charging is killing local businesses - theatre, cinema, restaurants, bars. You can't just pop for a swim or yoga now without it costing you even more now. The carparks are empty - which is so sad as charging puts people off - the additional cost adds up in a cost of living crisis. Especially for regular visits such as the pool or yoga studio for weekly classes.
- You should be helping not hindering town centres.
- Such a bad decision by SWB. Bring back no charges from 6pm to 8am!!
- Consider a reduction in car parking fees on market and event days to encourage independent and smaller traders, and tourism.
- Do not substantially increase charges for, or decrease provision of, parking used by urban residents without their own provision or which provide access to country walks etc. The latter are needed for exercise and health where the overall cost of withdrawing provision would be greater than the cost of providing it.
- I believe your general parking policy is completely wrong if you want people to "use the high street". Why would I pay to park if I wanted to just "pop in" to buy a snack from the bakers in the high street? Maybe £1.50 for a pie, plus a half our parking charge, plus the aggro of finding a machine that works, queue with everyone else, find some change for the machine (and remember, I don't have a smart phone), eventually get a ticket, walk back to where you've parked, put your ticket in the window correctly (so as not to chance a fine by some overzealous parking bod), and then, and only then, can you go and buy your pie. No, I won't bother, I'll go to Sainsbury's where I can park for nothing, and I don't have to worry about traffic wardens.
- Instead of your short sighted policy of raising as much money NOW from carpark charges (I know this probably raises plenty of short term revenue but this is at the expense of the high street retailers (just look at Canterbury high street – there's

nothing there!)), I suggest you make all parking free for two hours to enable people to just pop in to their local shops and spend their money. Further, get rid of the evening charges which directly affects the hospitality sector including small businesses such as Faversham cinema.

- The car park in the evening usually has around 5 cars in it now so is hardly bringing in substantial cash. It would be far better and safer to return to the old system and allow vehicles to park there free from 6.30. It would also promote Faversham town centre (including the cinema) as an attractive place to come in the evenings and help to support local business. The new car park charging timings do not work and are causing problems for visitors to the town and residents alike.
- It's bad enough that we have higher prices in the day time without being stung to attend a show or event in the evening. It would be sensible to go back to the cheaper evening tariff whilst leaving the day time tariff where it is.
- Charging people to park after 6pm is simply madness in Faversham, you usually find that the people who make these rules are not affected by them.
- Central car park in Faversham was previously free of charge after 6pm. This is a short stay car park which previously accommodated the overflow of town centre resident permit holders who could not otherwise find a space when returning home from work. Notwithstanding the fees, this is no longer an option as a vehicle can be parked there for a maximum of 4 hours, taking you to only 10pm. The evening charges are also adversely impacting on the local theatre, swimming pool, cinema and restaurants. In particular the theatre is run by volunteers who now have to pay to park. It would make sense for:
 - An overnight fixed charge from 6pm to 7am – say £1
 - Resident permit holders to be allowed to park free of charges from 6pm to 7am.
- Parking should be free again after 6.30pm it is killing the local evening economy and causing more parking issues on local side streets.
- Your job is to provide the services the public want and to control the cost, value and quality of those services. You are tasked to manage public infrastructure and land in the interests of the community and not just the Council coffers or green agendas.
- As a minimum you should be providing the following financial information as you should be monitoring it and it would not be commercially sensitive. You are a geographic monopoly after all! It is:
 - the past 3 years total costs associated with running the Swale parking operation (separated between direct and contractor costs)
 - the income generated in total by Swale, then split by permits, parking charges and penalties
 - how much of the income goes outside Swale to contractors, consultants and advisors
 - how much of the income is retained by Swale and the profit you believe you are making
 - the forecast financial benefits of the changes you are proposing for Swale, plus the changes to contractors income. Then show the direct costs of the changes and charges to the community
- Parking charges should be withdrawn for all locations around the town centre and congestion seen as a sign of a healthy economy. We want towns to be popular!
- It is interesting that pricing of parking is totally omitted. Do you not want the public to have a say in that area? Again, if you want to change parking prices that should be a

consultation to the public or even a simple referendum. The Swiss seem to have a very good system.

- Charging for on street parking should be minimised wherever possible as it is too easy for Councils to get hooked on the income. A 3 yearly review should be carried out to see which streets would benefit from the removal of on street charges. Penalties for the public parking on public roads and spaces should be a last resort for flagrant violation and not seen as an opportunity to scalp the public for economic gain.
- In order to support economic growth, Swale should be looking to encourage travel to all our centres of commerce and remove parking charges wherever possible as they are killing our High Streets and small businesses. If charges are necessary at a very few select occasions then they should be removed when major events are on. Swale should be looking to its towns to be major congestion centres showing that people wish to visit them and spend money.
- I'd like to object to charging for motorcycle parking. My 16 year old daughter volunteers at the British Heart Foundation on a Saturday. She rides her Moped and parks it in one of the town centre car parks. If she needs to start paying for her parking, she won't be able to continue with her volunteering job. You can only park for 4 hours max and her shift is longer than that. She also sometimes parks in the town when she goes to her 6th form class, as her school don't allow their 16-18 year olds to park on the school site. The streets around Sittingbourne just aren't safe for her to leave her moped. It will get stolen. She parks it in the town centre car park as there is an element of safety involved too. Please reconsider charging for motorcycle parking. This will impact young people trying to get ahead in life. It's simply unfair.
- Motorcycle Parking. I have a motorcycle, I don't have a smartphone, or apps, on anything like it. You are being prejudiced and discriminating against people like me who don't own or use this type of equipment. It's not my fault that parking tickets are vulnerable to removal by unknown persons.
For the very small amount of motorcycles, and the small area they take up in a carpark, surely waiving the fee would be the simplest solution, I mean you can't be losing much revenue by doing this, can you?
- Motor cycle charges to be introduced in car parks – are residents then able to apply for a residents parking permit? How will this permit be displayed on the vehicle? It is acknowledged that they can pay only by Ringo due to inability to display a ticket. Similarly, how would they display a resident's parking permit? Where will motor cycles be able to park? If the only available parking is in pay and display carparks this is going to be extremely inconvenient and costly, particularly if the motor cycle is not used daily.
- - It would appear that the anti car lobby has now moved on to powered two wheelers. These are probably the best form of transport. They take up virtually no more space than a bicycle; do not contribute to congestion; journey times are predictable and seldom affected by traffic jams; safer for other road users as they have less kinetic energy in collisions (unlike all the 2 tonne EVs appearing on the road and releasing more particulates); they are more fuel efficient and have lower emissions in real life due to almost never sitting in queues and jams; not limited in range; etc The only method of payment is the RingGo app because a ticket cannot be affixed to a bike?! Then don't do it for the above reasons or people will just use their cars.
- You only have 15 spaces spread across 46 car parks. Not only is this ridiculous but you now propose to charge for parking a motorcycle!!! You can generally get 2 bikes in a car space and often up to 4 so again congestion is reduced. This was proposed

in London and has now been dropped after action by the public. Can you name who put this forward?

- Swale should introduce and advertise overnight parking for Motorhomes and campervans near town centres and costal areas. Like the French, have simple byelaws that limit the number of days you can stay (normally 2 or 3 nights). Motorhomes tend to be expensive and the owners have disposable income and spend it in the communities they visit. We tend to holiday in France and Germany due to their Aires and Stellplatz respectively. Motorhomes being in car parks at night also tends to stop misuse of the car parks and vandalism. We should be making our towns and holiday locations a pleasure and easy to visit. Allow the parking for free or a token level.