

### **Ratepayer Response to the Draft Budget 2026/27**

As a local ratepayer, I welcome the opportunity to comment on the Council's Draft Budget for 2026/27 and the associated Cabinet reports. My comments focus on transparency, value for money, service impact, and the long-term financial sustainability of the Council.

#### **1. Transparency and Accessibility**

The cover report provides a clear outline of the four budget documents being considered. However, as a resident and council taxpayer, I find it difficult to understand the overall financial position without a concise summary of:

- The main pressures facing the Council
- The key assumptions behind the budget
- The headline changes in spending and income

A short, plain-English overview would make the process more accessible to the public and improve confidence in the Council's financial management.

#### **2. Value for Money and Efficiency**

As a ratepayer, I expect the Council to demonstrate that it is:

- Reducing avoidable costs
- Improving efficiency
- Protecting frontline services
- Avoiding unnecessary borrowing

I would welcome clearer evidence of:

- What efficiency savings have already been achieved
- What further savings are planned
- How the Council ensures that service reductions are a last resort

Residents need assurance that every pound collected in Council Tax is being used responsibly.

#### **3. Council Tax and Affordability**

Any proposed increase in Council Tax must be justified with:

- A clear explanation of why it is necessary

- Evidence that alternative options have been explored
- An assessment of the impact on households already facing cost-of-living pressures

Ratepayers deserve transparency about how much additional revenue the increase will generate and how it will be used.

#### **4. Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and Rent Setting**

For tenants, rent increases must be:

- Fair
- Justified
- Clearly linked to improvements in housing quality

Residents want reassurance that:

- Repairs and maintenance will improve
- Investment in housing stock is being prioritised
- The HRA remains financially sustainable without placing undue burden on tenants

#### **5. Capital Strategy and Borrowing**

The Capital Strategy should clearly explain:

- How much the Council plans to borrow
- The risks associated with borrowing
- How the Council will ensure affordability in future years

Ratepayers need confidence that borrowing is being used for essential, value-adding projects rather than discretionary spending.

#### **6. Risks and Financial Resilience**

The Council should provide a clear, public-facing explanation of:

- The main financial risks
- How these risks are being managed
- The adequacy of reserves

Residents want assurance that the Council is prepared for unexpected pressures and is not relying on one-off funding to balance the budget.

## **Conclusion**

As a ratepayer, I appreciate the complexity of setting a balanced budget in challenging financial circumstances. However, I believe the Council must strengthen:

- Transparency
- Public communication
- Evidence of value for money
- Long-term financial planning

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