

Budget conversation – advice agency linked comments and response

Budget conversation question: Are there any specific services that you think the council could reduce or stop doing?	
Comment	Response
Grant support to voluntary sector, harsh but if CBC can't afford it, they can't afford it.	<p>The Council's Budget Strategy was approved by Council in July 2023. The accompanying report detailed the need to drive out savings of at least £2.5m at pace. This would be within a framework that is prudent, responsible, and sustainable, and optimised to secure savings in the short- and medium-term to reduce and remove reliance on reserves, stabilising the Council's financial position and establishing affordability of Council services.</p> <p>Following the Budget Strategy approval, a detailed approach to addressing the £2.5m budget gap was developed and approved by Cabinet in November 2023. One of the proposals within the plan is to phase out the discretionary grants to voluntary sector advice agencies.</p> <p>The current funding agreement runs out on 31.03.24 and we could end the contract with three months notice. However, we have sought to avoid this type of guillotine position and are seeking to establish a reasonable transition period which is affordable to the Council but also enables some adjustment time for the advice agencies.</p>
You must provide statutory services. I'm unaware of 90% of the services the local government provides. I would say stop providing grants to community groups for a couple of years to rehabilitate the budget.	
It is preferable to not reduce services this year, and the budget position may change following the general election next year. It's essential to provide all central council services, including maintaining parks and open spaces, some public toilets and supporting the voluntary sector. Council need to keep what they have in services.	<p>Longer-term reform of local government funding has been delayed until the next Parliament and a structural solution is needed to meet the many statutory duties and demands placed on local authorities. Local authorities continue to lobby strongly for a long term sustainable financial settlement, but it is becoming less likely that this will occur in the short term.</p> <p>During the consultation with the advice agencies impacted, we stated that we remain open to conversations with the agencies and indeed other community and voluntary sector organisations regarding future projects and partnership opportunities. However, this relies on either external funding streams becoming available or a significant uplift in central government funding for either existing activities or new burdens.</p>

<p>Budget conversation question: Do you anticipate any issues with the council taking this approach (reducing services offer / stop doing)? Please briefly explain what they are.</p>	
<p>VCS brings HUGE financial value to the whole community...volunteers are the soft underbelly of the delivery of SO many much-needed services...VCS supports and encourages these volunteers given them confidence to continue to deliver unbelievable amounts of input for the good folk of Chesterfield</p>	<p>We recognise the value of the community and voluntary sector and have been a major supporter of the sector for many years. In addition to this particular funding stream to the four advice agencies we have assisted many groups with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finding affordable accommodation • Offering advice and support in developing external funding bids • Offering advice and support around event planning and fundraising • Use of facilities including markets and parks and open spaces for activities • An extensive concessions policy with specific provisions to support community and voluntary sector groups • Sponsored events • Allocated £465,000 of UKSPF funding to enable resilience and capacity building within the local community and voluntary sector. This included a significant grant programme and training programme. <p>During the consultation with the advice agencies impacted, we stated that we remain open to conversations with the agencies and indeed other community and voluntary sector organisations regarding future projects and partnership opportunities.</p> <p>The current funding agreement with the four advice agencies runs out on 31.03.24 and we could end the contract with three months notice. However, we have sought to avoid this type of guillotine position and are seeking to establish a reasonable transition period which is affordable to the Council but also enables some adjustment time for the advice agencies.</p>
<p>Advice services provide important help to people struggling with information, rights etc. They provide such services at a lower cost than what a LA could. How would the authority cope with the public turning to them for help instead?</p>	<p>We are seeking to enable a managed transition period for funding rather than the minimum 3 months notice. This will enable service transformation (if necessary) and the opportunity to develop alternative funding plans. Chesterfield Borough Council will also have the transition period to adjust service provision if required.</p> <p>The services provided by the advice agencies are different and additional to the services</p>

	<p>provided by Chesterfield Borough Council so we cannot undertake cost comparisons.</p> <p>The provision of grants to the community and voluntary sector is a discretionary provision which many local authorities do not provide.</p>
<p>Voluntary sector services provide many services much more efficiently and at a lower cost than statutory services. Cutting their grants will be devastating both for the charities and the people they provide support to</p>	<p>As above</p>
<p>I am concerned that if support of voluntary services is reduced this could increase people's health and wellbeing and possibly lead to more crime.</p>	<p>We are seeking to enable a managed transition period for funding rather than the minimum 3 months notice. This will enable service transformation (if necessary) and the opportunity to develop alternative funding plans. Chesterfield Borough Council and other agencies will also have the transition period to adjust service provision if required.</p>
<p>Advice agencies are essential at present due to financial constraints found by many.</p>	<p>As above</p>
<p>The advice agencies are our key local provision that protects health and wellbeing. For many people they are difference between being able to eat, heat their homes, avoid mental crisis, unsustainable debt and homelessness. Cutting advice agency funding will be a false economy as more chesterfield folk will end up with more council tax arrears, face eviction, homelessness and mental health crisis. The cost to the local authority will be far greater if these key services have reduced capacity to prevent these situations happening or the services one day will not be there. Advice agencies find sources of income, grants and benefits for residents they deal with debt problems, supporting people to get by. this is also brings extra income into the local economy. Reducing grant support would be a disaster.</p>	<p>As above</p>
<p>Yes. E.g. reduction to voluntary services likely to result in reduction of access to justice for local population.</p>	<p>As above.</p>
<p>The council already relies a lot on the voluntary sector so if services were reduced I think the people who volunteer would be too stretched to be able to take up supporting these services and they would fold.</p>	<p>None of the advice agencies impacted by this funding proposal have raised concerns about the need to 'fold'. They have indicated that there will need to be a period of adjustment which may result in location changes, some reduction in services and alternative funding plans.</p>
<p>Stopping core funding to voluntary organisations means they would have to close as they cannot apply for other funding without</p>	<p>There are many community and voluntary sector groups that successfully attract a range of external funding opportunities without core</p>

<p>core funding being in place. The Council must also consider the value for money of that core funding. It is increased many fold and brings thousands of pounds back into the local community. so called discretionary provision includes vital services for the most marginalised sectors of our community. Community groups rely on funding to operate; however, there are other sources of funding. Delivery of service for customers</p>	<p>funding from their local district/ borough council including many located within Chesterfield borough.</p> <p>There are many examples from around the country of similar advice agencies operating without funding from their local district/ borough council.</p> <p>When community and voluntary groups are first forming, it can be helpful in attracting external funding if the local council is offering either financial or in-kind support. The four agencies in question have been established for many years and have developed their reputation for delivery and have strong relationships with many different funders. We therefore do not believe that the financial contribution made by Chesterfield Borough Council will inhibit future funding bids.</p>
<p>Budget conversation question: Overall, are there any services that you feel should be protected from reductions in budget?</p>	
<p>Grant funding of voluntary services</p> <p>Derbyshire Law Centre, DUWC and other local advice agencies.</p> <p>Community and Voluntary Services - it's understandable that Councils are feeling the pinch, so our community and voluntary services are more valuable and needed than ever.</p> <p>Voluntary services</p> <p>Voluntary Sector Advice Agencies as they save money, bring money into the town and protect the most vulnerable.</p> <p>Grants to voluntary sector</p> <p>Budgets for voluntary sector</p>	<p>As an alternative option Cabinet could choose to continue to fund the advice agencies to the current 2023/24 level. However, this would be in direct conflict to the Budget Strategy Implementation Plan agreed by Cabinet on 14.11.23 and would significantly reduce our ability to develop a balanced budget for 2024/25 and beyond.</p> <p>The 2024/25 savings forecast would need to be found in-year and savings plans made for 2025/26 and beyond. The savings would need to be new areas, not already considered within the current Budget Implementation Plan.</p>