

Conservative Group Budget Proposal for 2024/2025

Ongoing Expenditure proposals

1. Freeze the council tax

It has been a difficult couple of years for residents dealing with the cost of living crisis resulting in part from the Russia-Ukraine war, and also with the pressures of the Covid-19 pandemic. Ever-increasing household bills, particularly in relation to heating and fuel costs, have hit people hard. It is proposed to freeze the council tax at 2023/24 levels to assist residents struggling to meet their living costs. The income forgone in 2024/25 as a result will be around £343,000.

2. Additional planning enforcement (compliance) officer

There is a need to bolster resources in the planning enforcement team and it is proposed to add an additional officer at a cost of £62,000 to provide for the growing demands and complexities of investigating breaches of planning conditions and consent.

3. Additional Envirocrime enforcement officer

There is an increasing problem with fly tipping nationally and South Cambs is not immune to this. It has been recognised that resources deployed to tackle this issue are woefully short and although additional resources are being deployed they don't go far enough. A further officer and dedicated vehicle are proposed to bolster the resources to tackle this anti-social behaviour. The cost of an officer would be £49,000 and the cost of the vehicle would be £50,000, which would be included in the Capital programme and is accounted for below under 'one off' proposals. The running costs of this additional vehicle are estimated at £21,000.

4. Additional contact centre officers

The contact centre is a vital resource to the Council in its interaction with residents of the district and it is important that it is properly resourced. Particularly given the extra strain that will be put on it with the administration's decision to hire out parts of the building, two further officers will enable the contact centre to deliver the level of service that the public rightly expect. The cost of this would be £74,000.

5. Tackling Isolation Officer

Mobility and social interaction are vital lifelines for residents living in more remote, rural South Cambs villages. The proposal is to employ a part-time Tackling Isolation Officer costing £16,000 who will work to support isolated residents and families, enabling them to socially interact within their local area.

6. Self-financing Transformation incentive scheme

Transformation works best when the process runs throughout the organisation, fuelled by bottom-up ideas. It is proposed to introduce a self-financing Transformation incentive scheme where staff are encouraged to suggest Transformation initiatives, to then be rewarded with a bonus if their idea is selected and if it saves the council money. Any reward would be paid using that saving. Devising new ideas would not be part of their normal day-to-day responsibilities.

Funding of ongoing Expenditure Proposals

7. Scrap the four-day week

The additional costs relating to the four-day week waste trial of £103,500 be used to part fund the ongoing proposals above.

8. Remove second Special Responsibility Allowance for councillors

It is proposed that the current policy that allows councillors to receive more than one Special Responsibility Allowance be discontinued, this will save around £14,000. This would ensure the council can continue to maximise the money it directs to delivering for residents.

9. Removal of the Transformation department

The Transformation department continues to be a significant area of expenditure for the council, amounting to £3.894 million in 2022/23. Further, we have seen this department expand by 63 staff since 2018/19.

It is proposed that the transformation process be done by existing staff in existing departments. Two members of staff would coordinate the programme and a member(s) of existing staff from each department would be seconded the role of delivering transformation in their department. This would ensure transformation is a bottom-up part of the process completed within departments, rather than top-down, and would save the council money in doing so. It is proposed that the difference between the total of expenditure proposals and savings proposals of £306,500 be removed from the ongoing Transformation budgets.

10. Data

It is proposed that the £111,000 bid for the two staff for the new internal data team is not taken forward at this time. The alternative proposal would be to allocate this responsibility to a member(s) of each department, who can then submit departmental data to senior leaders for collation. Completing this work with existing staff would save money and ensure data collection is done by experts in their respective departments.

11. Magazine

The council produces four issues of the South Cambs Magazine per year. It is proposed to reduce the number of issues from four to two, which will save around £30,000. Six-monthly magazines should provide readers with sufficient updates and information.

One off proposals

12. Remove bid for Systems Analyst post

Remove the bid for an extension to the systems analyst post, saving around £42,000.

13. Additional funding for fraud prevention and investigation

Local Authorities have in recent years seen increasing amounts of attempted fraud against them and, if anything, the Covid-19 pandemic and cost of living crisis has seen this sort of activity increase further. It is important to tackle this growing trend and preventative work is seen as a key element to achieving this. It is therefore proposed to invest £10,000 in further fraud prevention work and raising fraud awareness in the community and other related projects. The additional cost of the successful Key Amnesty project carried out this time last year was minimal.

14. Additional vehicle to tackle Envirocrime

An additional allocation be made in the capital programme for an additional vehicle for Envirocrime in the sum of £50,000.

15. Earmarked reserves

The remaining difference to one off items of £18,000 be funded from earmarked reserves.

Cllr Heather Williams

Leader of the Conservative Opposition

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