

2025/27 Budget consultation

Please complete this form online if possible by going to the 'Active Consultations' section of Bolton Council's website at www.bolton.gov.uk, where all background documents can also be found.

If you would like paper copies of any of the documents however, please contact the Consultation & Engagement Team on 01204 334875.

Consultation closes on 6 January 2025

Bolton Council is consulting on a two year plan to balance our 2025/27 budget and would like your views.

Along with other Local Authorities across the UK, Bolton Council continues to face financial challenges. We need to make some difficult decisions if we are to balance the books and protect the essential services that some of our most vulnerable residents depend on.

We invite you to give your views on the main proposals in the budget review, which are outlined within the questionnaire.

Please read the background documents, including the Frequently Asked Questions, for more information. These can be found online at www.bolton.gov.uk/directory/13/consultations/category/195

Your views will be considered alongside other information to help Bolton Council decide on the final budget options in February 2025.

Your response - keeping your data safe

Most questions are optional; just miss out any that you don't want to answer.

The results of this consultation may be made public. If you're responding as an individual you won't be identified in any report as your responses will be anonymised and grouped with those from other people. If you're responding in an official capacity your response may be published but no personal details will be included.

Any personal data you provide will be held securely, in line with our retention schedule and privacy policy, which can be found online at www.bolton.gov.uk/data-protection-freedom-information/privacy-notice

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Budget outline

Throughout this consultation we use '£m' to mean million pounds and '£k' to mean thousand pounds.

As things stand, we estimate that we will need to spend £1,167m to provide services in 2025/26 and 2026/27.

Our income for 2025/26 and 2026/27 is estimated at £1,142m. This includes grants, council tax, business rates, charges for services, filming revenue and other income.

This leaves us with a £25m shortfall.

We have looked at how we can best cover this shortfall to balance our budget. This is becoming increasingly difficult as we've been dealing with budget cuts for many years.

We are proposing to use £16.8m from our reserves, with the remaining £8.2m from increasing our income and making savings where we can.

One of the ways to increase income is to charge more for our services, including starting to charge for services that we haven't charged for before. We will try to find other ways to bring in extra income, but will also have to look at making cuts to services that we'd prefer not to make.

These are difficult decisions that we don't take lightly, as we know this will affect people in our community.

As well as the proposals we're asking about in this questionnaire, we will make further savings by taking common sense action - such as reviewing all contracts that come up for renewal to make sure they are competitive and provide value for money.

Your priorities

Understanding what services are a priority for you is important to us. Your priorities will help inform the way we deliver services and the decisions we make in the future.

Q1. Please select the THREE things that are most important to you from this list

- Action on poverty
- Adult social care
- Children's social care
- Becoming a net-zero carbon town and supporting our climate ambitions
- Community safety and tackling anti-social behaviour
- Community engagement, partnership working and support for voluntary services
- Investment into Bolton
- Keeping our neighbourhoods clean, including fly-tipping and littering
- Keeping our roads and pavements in good shape
- Maintaining parks and green spaces
- Providing leisure facilities such as leisure centres and sports pitches
- Providing cultural facilities such as libraries and museums
- Offering events such as Bolton Food & Drink Festival and Ironman
- Supporting residents to access digital services & technologies and investment into digitalising services
- Tackling homelessness and creating better housing
- Another priority- please give you priority below
- No opinion

If you've ticked 'Another priority' please give it here

Using reserves

During 2025/27, we're proposing to use £16.8m from the £35.5m reserves we hold specifically to support the budget process. This is a significant proportion of these reserves.

Reserves can only be used once and taking out too much could put us into severe financial difficulties in the future.

We need to maintain reserves to help balance budgets, and to reduce the need for service cuts in future years.

Q2. How strongly do you agree / disagree with the proposal to use some of our reserves to cover the projected budget shortfall?

- Strongly agree Agree Disagree Strongly disagree No opinion

Increase sales revenue

By looking at ways to increase sales income at Heaton Fold Garden Centre - such as holding additional events and special markets - we could potentially raise £5k.

Q3. How far do you agree / disagree that we should look at holding additional events and special markets to increase sales income at Heaton Fold Garden Centre?

- Strongly agree Agree Disagree Strongly disagree No opinion

Increasing charges

We could raise income by increasing how much we charge for some of the services we provide. This could include charging for some services that we don't charge for at the moment.

Car parks

We could bring in £20k by introducing charges on council car parks across the borough - including parks, introducing a three hour maximum stay, and enforcing all parking restrictions.

Bolton Market

Increasing stall rent and other fees charged to traders on Bolton Market could bring in £16k.

Bolton town centre

By renting out additional spaces in our town centres, we could increase our revenue and better commercialise our shopping and visitor attractions, for example having makers markets. This could raise £30k.

Trade waste

Charges for collection and disposal of trade waste could increase, bringing in £60k.

Garden waste

We're also considering charging for garden waste removal [which would bring in £1m]. We're not consulting on this now as the proposal has recently been consulted on separately. The proposal will be presented as an alternative savings option alongside the findings from this budget consultation.

Q4. How far do you agree / disagree with the following proposals around increased fees and charges?

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No opinion
Introduce pay & display car parking charges for all council owned car parks	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Enforce all parking restrictions, including a 3 hour maximum stay	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Increasing trader stall rent and other fees at Bolton Market	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Renting out additional spaces in our town centres	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Increase charges for collection and disposal of trade waste	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Council tax

Council tax is made up of a General Levy [for general services provided by Bolton Council] and Adult Social Care Levy [social care support for adults], as well as two Greater Manchester Mayoral Precepts [Fire Services, Police and the Greater Manchester Mayor].

Residents in Blackrod, Horwich and Westhoughton pay an additional Parish Levy, which goes towards the cost of their Town Councils.

Under government regulations, we're currently able to increase council tax by up to 5% a year without having to hold a referendum. If this limit doesn't change, we propose to increase council tax as follows:

2025/26 - we propose to raise council tax by 4.99%, made up of 2.99% for the General Levy and 2% for the Adult Social Care Levy.

This would mean an increase of £58.93 for a Band A property and £78.57 for a Band C property.

Each 1% rise in council tax would bring in around £1.43m, so the proposed 4.99% rise would bring in an extra £7.1m

2026/27 - we propose to raise council tax again by 4.99%, made up of 2.99% for the General Levy and 2% for the Adult Social Care Levy.

This would mean an increase of £61.88 for a Band A property and £82.51 for a Band C property.

Each 1% rise in council tax would generate around £1.51m, so the proposed 4.99% rise would bring in an extra £7.5m

If council tax doesn't rise by 4.99% each year, further cuts would need to be made to services in order to balance the budget.

In 2025/26 there would be no change to the council tax support scheme, which allows those in most need to apply for help towards paying their council tax. This would be reviewed for 2026/27.

Q5. How strongly you agree or disagree with the proposal to raise council tax by 4.99% each year?

- Strongly agree - please go to Q7
- Agree - please go to Q7
- Disagree - please go to Q6
- Strongly disagree - please go to Q6
- No opinion - please go to Q7

Q6. If you disagree, what should happen to council tax?

- No increase - please go to Q7
- Rise by less than 4.99% each year - please tell us how much below
- Rise by more than 4.99% each year - please tell us how much below
- Only rise by a total of 4.99% over two years - please go to Q7

How much do you think council tax should rise by?

Changing the way we deliver services

We could make saving by changing the way we deliver services. This section explains the main changes we're considering for each department.

Department of Place

Grit bins

Steeper areas of roads that have grit bins are currently provided with grit which residents can use to grit local pavements and roads in icy conditions. Whilst Bolton Council would continue to grit main traffic routes, we're proposing that grit will no longer be provided for residents to use. This would save £40k.

Subsidies for leisure centres users

Reviewing the level of subsidies we provide to service users at our leisure centres could save £200k.

Fleet vehicles

Our mileage data shows that some vehicles have a very low mileage. By undertaking a review of the number of vehicles the council has on its core fleet, we can reduce our stock whilst maintaining service delivery, resulting in a £200k saving.

Services to Schools

By reviewing our services to schools and increasing our contracts, we could save £200k.

Q7. Please say how far do you agree / disagree with the proposals to change the way we deliver services in the Department of Place

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No opinion
Stop providing grit for residents	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Reduce subsidies for leisure centre users	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Fleet vehicle review	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Review our services to schools	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Adult social care & housing

Residential and nursing home fees

Savings of £1.72m could be made by reducing the amount we spend on residential and nursing home fees. By working closely with health and social care professionals and putting in extra social care services and technology [such as medication reminders, falls and epilepsy detectors, and the Careline personal alarm system] we can help people to safely stay in their own homes for longer. This is generally better for them and reduces costs for the council.

Home care and direct payments

For some people, home care could be replaced by 'strength-based practices'. Rather than focussing on what people can't do, these look at what people are able to do for themselves, and the care and support available locally from family and voluntary services in the community. This would save £808k, and would also allow us to save around £776k on direct payments [where we give people money to arrange their own care].

Emergency and temporary accommodation

Emergency and temporary accommodation is provided for people in crisis who have nowhere else to go. We could save £70k by negotiating cheaper contracts for putting people up in hotels, and by transferring responsibility for paying energy bills from the council to the residents themselves.

Supported living

Supported living is when people are provided with specially designed accommodation and given higher levels of support than they would get in their own home. Some of our supported housing is quite old and doesn't meet current standards. This can make it expensive to maintain and means it's difficult to provide the standard of support we would like to offer. By replacing unsuitable housing with modern, purpose built facilities we could save around £696k and provide residents with better care. A separate consultation would take place around any proposals to change supported living schemes. These would give residents and other stakeholders the opportunity to consider the options and share any views and concerns.

Q8. How far do you agree / disagree with the following proposals around changing the way we deliver adult services & housing?

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No opinion
Help people stay in their own homes for longer and reduce the amount spent on care home fees	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Reduce home care services for some people by promoting strength-based practices	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Reduce direct payments by promoting strength-based practices	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Make residents in emergency and temporary accommodation responsible for their own energy bills

Negotiate cheaper hotel provision for emergency & temporary accommodation

Provide modern purpose-built supported living accommodation

Children's services

Children's services provide a range of services and support designed to give children the best possible start in life. Savings of £390k could be made by thoroughly reviewing the way we deliver these services. In addition, Bolton Council are going to make every effort to keep inflationary budgets in line with the 2024/2025 budget, creating a saving of £230k.

Q9. How far do you agree / disagree with the proposal to undertake a thorough review of the way children's services are provided?

Strongly agree

Agree

Disagree

Strongly disagree

No opinion

Corporate Resources

Events provided by other organisations

We could look at reviewing the events we fund, including reducing payments to organisations who we currently fund to provide local events. This could save £25k.

Instead of being funded by the council, organisations could apply to other funders for example Arts Council England or Bolton's Fund, which provide grants to a range of organisations, including the voluntary, community and social enterprise sectors.

Bolton's Fund has been operating for five years and supports all sorts of activities that local voluntary and community sector organisations undertake. The fund is managed by Bolton Community & Voluntary Services, and all decisions about funding are made by trained independent assessors.

Libraries

£100k could be saved within the library service, however, we want to avoid closing libraries and a great way to do this is by maximising the use of library buildings across the borough.

A service-wide review would take place of all our assets, such as buildings, staff, books, computers and other ICT equipment. We already encourage partners, other services and groups to use our library spaces, which not only allows us to share costs, but also improves the services for our visitors and helps us to attract new customers.

The review would also look at new way of providing library services, including the use of new technology. These could be more efficient and open up new opportunities so that more people use our libraries. Other operational matters such as reviewing contracts, raising more income and exploring new suppliers will be looked at to increase value for money.

Once more detail is known, we will seek the views of the public and other stakeholder if any major changes are proposed.

Q10. How far do you agree / disagree with the following proposals around changing the way we deliver services in Corporate Resources?

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No opinion
Review funding for events provided by other organisations	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Maximising use of libraries	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Contract efficiencies

£1.013m could be saved by making efficiencies across the council, including reviewing contracts for purchasing goods and services.

Q11. How far do you agree / disagree with the proposal to make contract efficiencies across our services, including contracts for purchasing goods and services?

- Strongly agree
 Agree
 Disagree
 Strongly disagree
 No opinion

Staffing costs

Staffing costs cover all costs associated with employing staff, such as salaries, payroll taxes, overtime, agency costs and recruitment. We're continually looking to look at way to reduce staffing costs but could save a further £503k.

This could be done in a number of ways, such as by continuing to review vacancies, so that when someone leaves they aren't automatically replaced and instead we look to see if the job could be done in a different way.

Where there's increased need for a service, we could employ more staff instead of paying regular and enhanced overtime rates, and could reduce the number of agency staff, who cost more than staff we directly employ.

Whilst it's important that staff are well trained, we currently allocate money for training that isn't used, so this could be deleted from the budget, and subscriptions to trade journals could be reviewed [including looking at digital rather than print subscriptions], as could travel expenses. These measures could save £51k.

Q12. How far do you agree / disagree with the following proposals around staff costs?

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No opinion
When someone leaves, look at the job to see if it could be done differently rather than recruiting	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Reduce regular overtime payments	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Keep agency staff to a minimum	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Reduce the training budget	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Reduce spend on travel expenses	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Reduce trade journal subscriptions	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Digital services

New technology is being developed all the time and savings of around £652k could be made by switching more services online and making increased use of digital technology and ICT systems to reduce administration costs.

This often provides a better, more efficient service, in a way that many customers prefer. However we're aware that not all our residents are able to use technology, so alternatives would be provided where needed.

Q13. How far do you agree / disagree with the following proposals around digital services?

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No opinion
Upgrading digital technology systems in our workplaces	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Providing more customer services online	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Other proposals

Bereavement services

We could review charges made for cremations and burials and grave upkeep to cover more of our costs. We could also trim overheads where possible, review contracts and cost to save £335k.

Licensing and grants

Licensing and grant income could increase by £56k, by seeking additional grants, and by introducing 'additional licensing', so that all Houses in Multiple Occupation [HMO] with three or more occupants who aren't part of the same household need to be licensed.

Q14. How far do you agree / disagree with the following proposals?

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No opinion
Raise charges for bereavement services	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Seeking additional grants	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Introducing licensing for smaller HMOs with 3 or more occupants	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Impact of the proposals

Q15. Please describe how you, your family or the people you represent will be affected if the budget proposals are carried out

Q15.a No impact

No comments

Alternatives

Q16. Please use this space if you want to suggest any other ways Bolton Council could address the £25m budget shortfall whilst still delivering statutory services

Q16.a No comments

Further comments

Q17. Please use this space for any further comments about the budget proposals

Q17.a No comments

Your interest

Q18. Which of the following best describes you / your family's interest in this consultation? You must answer this question

- Live in Bolton borough [Bolton Council area] - please go to Q19
- Work in Bolton borough - please go to Q19
- Study / have children at school in Bolton borough - please go to Q19
- Visitor to Bolton - please go to Q19
- Official response from Parish / Bolton borough Councillor / Elected Member - please answer Q18b and c, then end the survey without completing the 'About you' section
- Official response from a business / organisation / community group. You must have their permission to submit an official response on their behalf - please answer Q18b and c, then end the survey without completing the 'About you' section
- None of the above - please answer Q18a, then end the survey without completing the 'About you' section

Q18a Please say what your interest is

Q18b Please say which ward, business organisation or community group you represent

Q18c Please say what your role is - in what official capacity do you represent the ward, business, organisation or community group?

About you

Your answers in this section help us to make sure we are getting views from different types of people. They won't be used to contact or identify you.

Q19. Please give your full postcode

Q20. Are you...?

- Female Male Identify in another way

Q21. Which age group are you in?

- Under18 55 - 64
 18 - 24 65 - 74
 25 - 34 75 - 84
 35 - 44 85 or over
 45 - 54

Q22. Do you look after, or give any help of support to family members, friends, neighbours or others who need help because they have a long-term physical or mental ill-health / disability, or have problems relating to old age?

Please don't count anything you do as part of paid employment.

- No Yes, 20 - 49 hours a week
 Yes, 1-19 hours a week Yes, 50 or more hours a week

Q23. Are your day-to-day activities limited because of a long-term physical or mental health condition / illness?

- Yes, limited a lot Yes, limited a little No

Q24. What is your ethnic group?

- White British Asian or Asian British
 White other Black, Black British, Caribbean or African
 Mixed or Multiple ethnic group Other ethnic group

Q25. Which of the following best describes your financial situation?

This question helps us to see how people are being affected by the cost of living

- I often can't afford basic necessities [food, heating etc]
- I sometimes struggle to afford basic necessities
- I can afford basic necessities but have very little spare money
- I can afford basic necessities and have some spare money to spend on extras or save
- I'm comfortably off and have no money worries
- Don't know, as I don't have responsibility for managing finances

Thanks! Please post to: Freepost RTTT-YTEL-YSXS, Consultation & Engagement Team, 2nd Floor, Town Hall, Victoria Square, Bolton, BL1 1RU.