

Conwy County Borough Council
Budget Survey 2025 – Feedback to communities

Mae'r ddogfen hon ar gael yn Gymraeg hefyd

Many thanks to those who took the time to share their views on the budget survey. The information has now been analysed and presented to Elected Members to help inform their decision to set a balanced budget for 2025/ 2026. You can find the report here [Budget 2025/2026](#)

We've grouped together the common feedback themes we received, and where we can, provided explanation.

1) Reduce Costs and be more efficient:

Over the last twelve years, we have successfully made budget savings of £94 million by changing services and modernising the way we work, to be as efficient as possible.

There were numerous suggestions within this theme, such as:

Freeze or don't collect council tax.

The Local Government Finance Settlement decides how much of the public funding in Wales will be given to each council. The funding is made up of the Welsh Government Revenue Support Grant and non-domestic rates (NDR/ business rates) which are pooled across Wales and redistributed based on each council's population using a needs-based formula. 70% of our funding is received this way. The other 30% is raised locally by council tax.

Council Tax is a statutory tax which means we are required by law to levy a tax on occupiers (and some owners) of dwellings within the council's area. The amount varies according to the band of the dwelling which is decided by the Valuation Office Agency, based on the value of the dwelling. Council tax is not a direct charge for the services we provide, nor is it a direct charge for individual services received. The amount of Council Tax collected helps the Council to provide services for the benefit of the community as a whole.

The % increase in council tax for dwellings and for empty and second homes, is a local democratic decision, but the council cannot decide to not issue council tax.

There was a survey suggestion to review council tax banding. This is currently under review with Welsh Government. You can read more about this on their webpage: [Council Tax reform | GOV.WALES](#)

In addition, councils are able to apply for additional funding through Welsh Government grant programmes and also raise money through fees and charges for services and goods.

Temporarily remove the single person council tax discount.

This is not within Conwy's powers to alter – we are required by law to apply this discount to those eligible.

Close unnecessary buildings and adopt a hybrid work week to save on energy and commuting costs.

This is already in place for office based staff. All teams have a team agreement which ensures that every week they attend the office, as well as working from home. Conversely some suggested we should reduce the number of staff working from home. Through modernising the way we work, since 2018 we have closed our large bases at Dinerth Road offices, the Civic offices, Glan y Don building, annexe, and caretaker lodge. In addition, 12 other aging and inefficient smaller offices in Colwyn Bay and Llandudno have also been closed and we have agreed the sale of Bodlondeb Council office which will complete in early summer, reducing our office footprint down to 1 main office.

The majority of our staff (60%) are not office based and are out working within communities across the county.

There was particular reference to Mochdre Commerce Park. At present, whilst legal proceedings progress we are unable to provide a further update on the status of the building lease. An update will be presented to Councillors when legal proceedings have concluded.

Protect Education budgets, amalgamate and invest in schools

Where possible school budgets have been protected, however the balance of budget reductions has to be shared across all essential services. We are actively supporting School Senior Leaders and Governing Bodies to find ways to make schools more efficient, which is key as pupil numbers are reducing. This includes supporting the amalgamation of schools and the build of new schools. We are trying to do this in an innovative manner to ensure we have schools fit for future generations.

Reduce spending on the Welsh language to only what is legally required.

The duty to support and promote the Welsh language is a legal requirement. We are proud to be a bilingual authority and to promote the Welsh Language. We've recently updated our Welsh Language promotion Strategy, [Ein Llais Cymraeg](#), which demonstrates that Cymraeg belongs to us all. Our Welsh language costs are not significant, in fact our translation team generate income, and celebrating our rich Welsh culture draws in tourism.

Remove non-productive or under-performing staff and review high pay scales for roles that don't warrant it.

We have a framework for this which is called the Conwy Conversation which ensures every member of staff has regular conversations with their line manager. This includes conversations about performance. Should a member of staff not be performing as expected, then we have HR policies which are followed such as the capability policy or disciplinary policy. This ensures that all our staff are supported to perform well in their roles.

We use a job evaluation scheme for staff pay. Job evaluation is a systematic gender neutral process used to determine the skills and complexity of different job roles. This enables us to create a fair and consistent pay structure, so that employees are fairly rewarded based on their contribution and abilities, rather than personal bias or unlawful discrimination. This ensures that no matter what type of role a member of staff has, it has been fairly assessed

so that the correct level of pay is allocated. We publish a [pay policy statement](#) every March which clearly shows the levels of pay for all staff.

We also publish [Member salaries, allowances and expenses](#) every year. We do not negotiate or set staff or member pay awards. These are negotiated nationally each year.

Amalgamate county councils to reduce the number of employees and axe non-frontline posts

There have been Welsh Government debates over the years to merge councils. In 2014, Conwy and Denbighshire Councils volunteered to merge. However it was identified that it would cost significantly more to merge than the savings that could be achieved and it would not reduce the number of employees significantly.

There are no posts in the authority that are not required. If a post is no longer required, we follow a redundancy process and or delete the post when an officer resigns. We also issue fixed term posts to ensure we do not employ people beyond the length of time funding or the task is required. Non frontline posts are often a target for budget reductions, but they are essential to keep frontline services running smoothly such as paying bills, recruiting and training staff, maintaining IT equipment and ensuring we act within the law.

Stop spending on all non-essential services and close them immediately.

Non-essential or 'discretionary' services are those services that a council has the power, but is not obliged, to provide. Statutory services are those a council must provide, but the level of service they provide is a local decision. Discretionary services can be critical to the delivery of statutory functions, and without them some statutory activity could be overwhelmed. For instance, leisure, sports and recreation services play an important role in reducing demand on health services as well as teaching young people life skills and general wellbeing for all. Aids and adaptations and the provision of community equipment help reduce demand on residential care.

Stop funding things that you can no longer afford.

We have already done this over the years. Over a decade of reductions in public finances has meant that councils across the UK have had to cut budgets, stop services, become ever more efficient, reduce staff and generate new income. However, despite prioritising services targeted at helping to protect the most vulnerable and pursuing new ways of working to reduce spend and increase capacity, councils are increasingly finding it difficult to manage with reduced funding and provide the services that they are legally required to do so. This is not about bad financial management but rather about an increase in demand for our services, (particularly in social care, education and housing), pay pressures including Employers National Insurance increases, and general inflation which means everything we buy costs more.

Stop wasting money on 'vanity' projects

All of our key projects are developed based on community need and presented to democracy for approval. They are carefully assessed and scrutinised based on cost and community need and all works are tendered to ensure we get the best value for money. Sometimes we hear people say that we should not be spending on some works such as sea defence or cycle routes, and we should spend them on schools or pot holes instead. These projects are usually grant funded from Welsh Government. This means they are additional

funding which is allocated to us on the condition the money can only be spent on the project they were allocated to.

Build more social homes to reduce temporary accommodation costs and invest in prevention services to save money in the long term.

We have a Housing and Homelessness Programme which is working hard to reduce homelessness and access to affordable housing. The supply of affordable housing comes from the turnover of existing homes and new social housing development. On average 291 social housing units are available to let each year. The delivery of new social housing in 2023/24 was 37 and the forecast delivery for 2024/5 is 34. These figures are low compared to previous years because Conwy was heavily impacted by the difficulties experienced by contractors and developers and stalled sites post Covid.

We continue to work with Registered Social Landlords to ensure deadlines are met to spend the Social Housing grant allocation in full, and to take up any additional funding at the end of the year. Two new schemes have started on site to date, and 2 more are expected to start on site before the end of the financial year. The delivery from the 4 schemes will be 160 units in total; 112 social rented properties, including 44 x 1 bedroom and 18 x 4 bedroom+ units, 45 intermediate rented properties and 3 social care housings units (within 1 shared property).

2) Suggestions to generate income

There were numerous suggestions within this theme, such as:

Charge for beach parking, increase the cost for public toilets, introduce a tourism tax, increase the cost of parking fees, care home fees, planning fees and leisure fees as well as reintroduce fines for late library books and create resident and staff parking permits.

We have a fees and charging strategy which is reviewed and updated annually. In terms of introducing a tourism tax, this is a matter that requires a change in legislation and then further local political debate. The Visitor Accommodation (Register and Levy) Etc. (Wales) Bill was laid before the Senedd in November 2024. The Bill provides a permissive power to local authorities to decide whether or not they want to introduce a visitor levy in their local areas. This cannot be decided locally until the bill passes into law.

3) Suggestions for improved business processes

Transparency and Accountability: Many comments stressed the importance of transparency in council spending and decision-making.

There are regular reviews of proposed spend and all purchases over £1000 have to go before a procurement Board or spending panel. There is clear communication with taxpayers about how their money is being spent through the various budget reports which are presented to the council throughout the year. We appreciate that these are long and technical documents, so we have developed a video to show how funds are spent. Each

year we also publish infographics about how budgets are allocated across services and what we deliver in a day, in a week, in a year.

Reduce the number of councillors.

The number of councillors we have is not set by Conwy. It is the role of the Electoral Commission. The number of councillors has reduced after the recent review of electoral boundaries, which reduced the number of councillors in 2022 from 59 to 55. The Councillor salaries are not set by Conwy either. They are set by the Independent Remuneration Commission and are set to a level to promote diversity so that anyone of any age, gender or background has the financial support to undertake this community role rather than it only being eligible to those who have retired or are in a financial position to stop working. It should also be noted that some Councillors do continue to work alongside their Councillor responsibilities.

Maximising the use of technology: There were suggestions to make more use of AI.

We are actively exploring ways that digital solutions can support us to do things more quickly, more efficiently and to increase capacity. However we are also mindful that from a customer perspective, there are residents who are not digitally literate, or may not have access to technology. We are therefore ensuring that we balance technical changes with the need to continue with the option of talking to a member of staff.