



Westmorland
& Furness
Council

westmorlandandfurness.gov.uk

Funding our future

Budget Consultation 2024/25

Closing date 19 January 2024



“We want to support people to have healthy lives, reduce inequality, drive delivery of carbon net zero, support biodiversity, support our communities and enable sustainable and inclusive economic growth.”



Foreword

Since the creation of Westmorland and Furness Council on 1 April we have been working hard to deliver real improvements on the ground to our residents and communities in line with our council plan.

In our council plan we are clear about our ambition and our vision. We want Westmorland and Furness to be a great place to live, work and thrive.

We are also clear about our priorities as laid out in the council's delivery framework. We want to support people to have healthy lives, reduce inequality, drive delivery of carbon net zero, support biodiversity, support our communities and enable sustainable and inclusive economic growth.

We know our focus on these issues will make a positive difference. We also know that achieving the transformation and greater efficiency of our services and the delivery of our priorities must be done in a financially sustainable way.

It has been an exciting, and challenging first year, and on the following pages are a few of the achievements that we have already delivered for our residents, communities and businesses. This includes in the 2023/24 financial year a programme of priority investment of £5 million to support Westmorland and Furness to be a great place to live, work and thrive.

Cllr Andrew Jarvis
Cabinet Member for Finance

Sam Plum
Chief Executive



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Cabinet Member
for Finance



Sam Plum
Chief Executive



Since Westmorland and Furness Council was formed in April 2023, we've been busy working on a wide range of projects designed to help and support our communities.

Here are just some examples of what the council has achieved so far:



Up to **100%** reduction in council tax for those on low incomes, helping over 13,000 households



£6m expansion of Sandgate SEND School, Kendal

Invested **£1.1m** to ensure every young person eligible for free school meals received meals during the summer holidays



£5million committed for investment this financial year in projects to support delivery of the Council Plan



New Highways spending plan including **£8.5million** for potholes



Launched Part 1 of our **Climate Action Plan**

£500k invested to make the area smoke free for 2030



Agreed investment in a **2MW solar farm site** in Barrow, a first in Cumbria

We held our first **Provider Forum** event bringing together domiciliary, residential and nursing home providers signalling the start of a new relationship with providers





We have a plan to **reduce vacancies** across our care services – including a ‘grow our own’ programme of opportunities

Started a review into our **Early Help offer**



Delivered a new “hub and spoke” model for our **Family Hub** in Barrow



Plans progressing for **£17.5m investment** to transform Barrow Market



Delivered a state of the art **3G turf pitch at Penrith** with an **£870,000 investment**



New **20mph** neighbourhoods policy introduced



In our first 100 days we reduced our social work waiting list by almost **50%**



Plan to eliminate the waiting list for people needing **low level pieces of equipment** – maintaining their independence

Established **three new Locality Boards** – Eden, Furness and South Lakeland – to promote close working with communities



We initiated a new **Promoting Independence Programme** within Adult Social Care



Kendal Library refurbishment



Hosted our first **Children in Care Council Awards**

“We must invest to transform services so that we can realise savings and deliver on the benefits that can be achieved by us being a unitary council. This is essential to deliver on our ambition of being financially sustainable.”

Cllr Andrew Jarvis
Cabinet Member
for Finance



The challenge ahead

Even with these achievements we still have so much to do. We have so many services that still need to be reviewed and ‘harmonised’ such as waste and like everyone else we continue to experience rising costs.

We calculate that the cost of delivering essential local services will increase by £27.5 million in 2024/25. The funding we expect from the Government will not meet this increase and to ensure that we continue to support essential local services we remain reliant on the income generated via council tax to help increase the council’s income. This will allow us to invest in change, transformation and support our communities. To really deliver as Westmorland and Furness Council we need to save in some areas in order to invest in others. By doing this we will be able to achieve an efficient and effective council that can deliver on its ambitions and provide services that will benefit everyone.

We are also fully aware of the pressures on our residents and families with the rising cost of living and as such, after careful consideration, we are proposing to increase council tax for 2024/25 by 4.99%.

At the time of this consultation being launched even with this increase the council still has a budget gap of £5million. But work is underway to close this gap and the council is confident that it will be able to agree a balanced budget, which is a legal requirement, at its Full Council meeting on 22 February 2024.

We know that many households are finding it difficult financially and the rising cost of living continues to be a huge burden for many. That is why we have tried hard to keep the increase to the minimum and will continue to support those who are financially vulnerable through our generous council tax reduction scheme.

We continue to be one of only a few councils across the country who give up to 100% reduction on council tax for working age residents which means our scheme is one of the most generous of its kind in the country.

Last year there was a requirement to harmonise the various council tax reduction schemes into one single scheme. This meant that we introduced a consistent and fair 'means' testing approach for all new applicants to the scheme from the Westmorland and Furness Council area. This has resulted in a reduced financial pressure on the council tax reduction scheme and created an opportunity for us to allocate £400k of additional discretionary financial support (resulting in a total scheme value of £732k). This means that we can help even more families and individuals stay in their own homes.

As a result of the introduction of the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023, we are proposing to delay the higher level of council tax on second homes to 1 April 2025. Second home ownership has a big impact in parts of Westmorland and Furness. By charging a higher rate of council tax we can generate significant additional income to help us deliver our priorities for the area and provide additional assistance to communities affected by tourism and second home ownership.

We are also seeking your view on our proposal to apply the empty homes premium on properties that are substantially unfurnished to be applicable after 1 year (changed from 2 years previously) and our proposal to increase the empty properties premium from 300% to 400% - which is only chargeable after 10 years of a property being empty.

Overall considering the national picture, our budget is in reasonable shape but there are many challenges and pressures. We are unlikely to receive sufficient funding from Government to deliver the increasing demand on our frontline services which means that at the time of this consultation starting we have a £5m gap. However we feel this is manageable and that we will be able to close this gap by February and achieve our legally required balanced budget for 2024/25.

With so much money to find it is essential that we also find new ways of doing things. We must invest to save and focus on transforming services so we can realise savings as we move ahead and deliver on the benefits that can be achieved as a result of us being a unitary council.

At Westmorland and Furness Council one of our core values is listening to our communities and working with you on the issues that matter most.

That is why I am encouraging everyone to share their views on what we are proposing through this consultation process. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Councillor Andrew Jarvis
Cabinet Member for Finance



Introduction

In this consultation we are making five key proposals:

- 1** Increase the rate of council tax for 2024/25 by **2.99%** and implement the Government's **2%** rise for the Adult Social Care precept – making a total increase of **4.99%**
- 2** Increase the council tax rate paid on second homes as part of our plan to tackle the affordable housing crisis by introducing a second homes premium of **100%** from 1 April 2025
- 3** From 1 April 2024 apply the empty homes premium on properties that are substantially unfurnished **after 1 year** – rather than the current 2 years
- 4** From 1 April 2024 increase the empty homes premium on properties that are substantially unfurnished for more than 10 years from **300%** to **400%**
- 5** Apply an inflationary uplift of **6.7%** on our discretionary fees and charges

This total 4.99% council tax increase will mean we can continue to deliver essential local services and start work on our ambitious plans to transform services now that we have stabilised in our first year.

In line with our commitment to be a listening council, we would like to hear your views on what we are proposing.



Our financial position

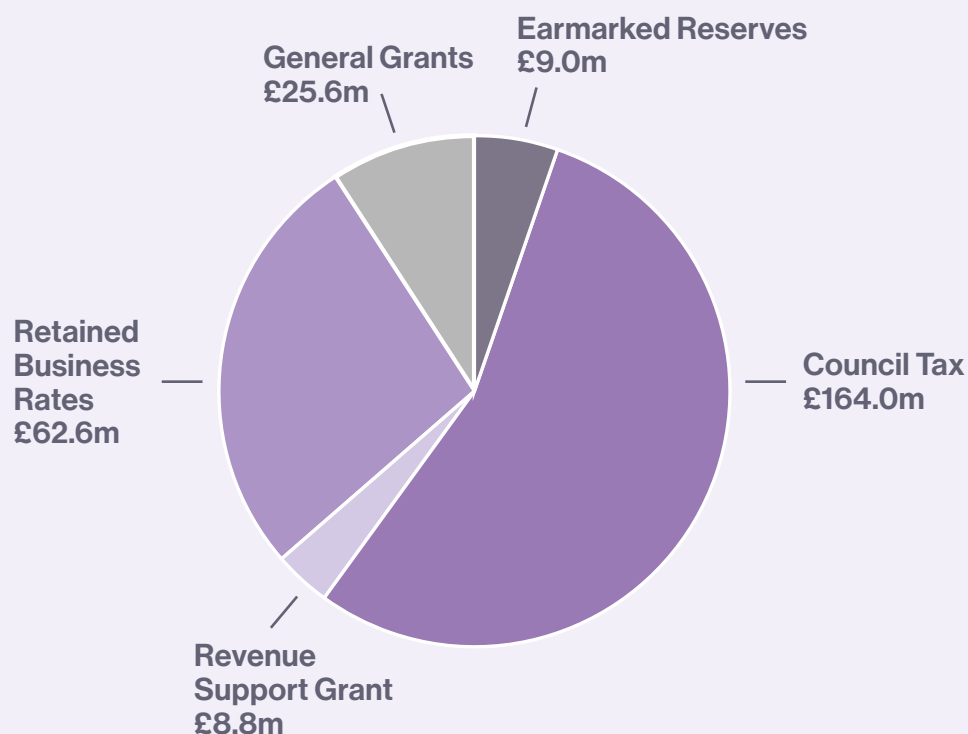
Westmorland and Furness Council is responsible for all your local council services, everything from refuse collection to recycling, highways to parks, social care to children's services and from leisure to culture. In total we deliver hundreds of different services, some that benefit everyone and some that are targeted to those most in need in our communities.

In our first year our focus has been on stabilisation, getting the basics right and setting a balanced budget.

We now need to start on our transformation journey and realise all the benefits that a unitary council can bring. We are committed to working towards financial sustainability through transformation and this will be delivered through our improvement and integration work and through our collaboration with partners.

We calculate that our expected net revenue budget (the amount we will need to spend to deliver local services) will be circa £270 million in 2024/25. That money comes from our earmarked reserves, government grants, business rates, and council tax paid by residents.

Sources of funding to support our £270m (circa) net revenue budget



Increasing the council tax rate

Council tax will account for over half of the net income of Westmorland and Furness Council, so any change to the rate of council tax we charge makes a big difference to the council's income. For example, an 1% increase in council tax is equivalent to a £1.6 million increase in income.

To allow us to continue to provide essential local services and deliver our ambitions for the area we are proposing a 4.99% rise in council tax from 1 April 2024. This is made up of a 2.99% basic increase plus another 2% specifically to help fund adult social care, known as the Adult Social Care Precept.

What this means for individual households is explained in detail later in this document, but in summary the typical Band D council tax charge would be £1,827.76 per year, which equates to an additional £1.67 per week.



The proposal would generate approximately £164 million from council tax to be spent in our area.

The proposed rise is in line with what Government has assumed councils will implement.

Recognising the challenge of any council tax increase for people on low incomes, we will continue to offer a generous council tax reduction scheme to help those who need it. This is at a time when many councils have chosen to limit access or reduce the value of the council tax reduction they offer.





You can find out which council tax band your property is in from your latest bill or via gov.uk.

What the council tax increase would mean for you

The table below shows the effect the proposed council tax increase would have on the typical Westmorland and Furness council tax bill in each of the eight council tax bands.

For example, the weekly Band D council tax charge from Westmorland and Furness Council would increase by £1.67.

Table 1: Comparison between 2023/24 council tax charge and proposed charge for 2024/25

Rateable Value	2023/24 Total	General Council Tax 2.99%	Adult Social Care precept 2%	2024/25 Total	Overall Annual Increase 4.99%	Weekly Increase 4.99%
Band A (up to 40,000)	£1,160.59	£34.70	£23.21	£1,218.50	£57.91	£1.11
Band B (40,001 to 52,000)	£1,354.03	£40.49	£27.08	£1,421.60	£67.57	£1.30
Band C (52,001 to 68,000)	£1,547.46	£46.27	£30.95	£1,624.68	£77.22	£1.49
Band D (68,001 to 88,000)	£1,740.89	£52.05	£34.82	£1,827.76	£86.87	£1.67
Band E (88,001 to 120,000)	£2,127.75	£63.62	£42.56	£2,233.93	£106.18	£2.04
Band F (120,001 to 160,000)	£2,514.62	£75.19	£50.29	£2,640.10	£125.48	£2.41
Band G (160,001 to 320,000)	£2,901.48	£86.75	£58.03	£3,046.26	£144.78	£2.78
Band H (320,001 and over)	£3,481.78	£104.11	£69.64	£3,655.53	£173.75	£3.34

Parish, Town, Police and Crime Commissioner and Fire and Rescue Service precepts

Parish and town council precepts will be added to your council tax bill in addition to the precept set by Westmorland and Furness Council and would still vary depending on your parish or town council.

The Police and Crime Commissioner precept and the Cumbria Fire and Rescue Authority precept are also in addition to the precept set by Westmorland and Furness Council.

Increasing council tax rates on second homes

The council is working on increasing the provision of affordable housing in Westmorland and Furness.

High levels of second home ownership puts real pressure on the availability of housing for local people, both by reducing the supply of housing and driving up prices. It is one of our key council plan priorities to tackle these issues. We want to implement a consistent policy and approach for empty properties and second homes.

We are now proposing to delay the introduction of the 100% council tax premium on second homes until 1 April 2025. This would mean that council tax bills would be doubled for second homeowners from 1 April 2025.

We estimate that this could generate up to an additional £10 million for Westmorland and Furness each year, which could be used to support delivery of our priorities and help us tackle the affordable housing crisis in our area.

Driving out wider savings from the council

To ensure that the new council is as efficient as possible there will be some specific saving proposals in the coming months, but these savings do not affect front line services and for any that require it there will be specific statutory consultation carried out with anyone affected by any new proposals.

Fees and Charges

Income from fees and charges represents an important source of funds to the Council and enables a range of services to be provided within the area and beyond. The Council agreed a fees and charges policy that proposes an inflationary uplift annually for all discretionary fees and charges. The proposed increase for 2024/25 is on average 6.7% (this reflects the Sept 2023 Consumer Price Index).

Where required statutory consultations will apply including equality impact assessments where appropriate. This is to ensure that anyone potentially affected by any proposed change has the opportunity to comment in detail on that specific change.



What do you think?



We want to hear what you think of what we are proposing. Please share your views below and send your completed feedback form to **FREEPOST Westmorland and Furness Council** or complete the form online at **westmorlandandfurness.gov.uk**. Closing date 19 January 2024.

In what capacity are you responding to this consultation?

As a private individual

As a representative of an organisation

(Please tell us which organisation)

1 Do you agree or disagree with our proposal to increase general council tax by 2.99% to help pay for essential services that will be provided by Westmorland and Furness Council?

Agree

Disagree

Don't know

Any further comments?

2. Do you agree or disagree with our proposed approach to apply a 2% increase to pay for Adult Social Care?

Agree Disagree Don't know

Any further comments?

3. Do you agree or disagree with our revised proposal to increase the council tax rate paid on second homes, as part of our plan to tackle the affordable housing crisis by introducing a second homes premium of 100% from 1 April 2025? This would mean that council tax bills would be double for second home owners.

Agree Disagree Don't know

Any further comments?



4. Do you agree that from 1 April 2024 we should apply the empty homes premium on properties that are substantially unfurnished to be applicable after 1 year (changed from 2 years previously)?

Agree Disagree Don't know

Any further comments?

5. Do you agree that from 1 April 2024 that the long term empty homes premium is increased from 300% to 400% - chargeable after 10 years of a property being empty?

Agree Disagree Don't know

Any further comments?

6. Do you agree that we should apply an average inflationary uplift of 6.7% on our discretionary fees and charges?

Agree Disagree Don't know

Any further comments?

7. Do you have any further comments you would like to make?

About you

You do not need to, but to help us understand how people's views vary it would be helpful to know a little about you.

Are you?

Male Female Self define

What age are you?

Under 18 18-24 25-34 35-44 45-54
 55-64 65+

What is your ethnic group

Choose one option that best describes your ethnic group or background

White

- English / Welsh / Scottish / Northern Irish / British
- Irish
- Gypsy or Irish Traveller
- Any other White background

Mixed / Multiple ethnic groups

- White and Black Caribbean
- White and Black African
- White and Asian
- Any other Mixed / Multiple ethnic background

Asian / Asian British

- Indian
- Pakistani
- Bangladeshi
- Chinese
- Any other Asian background

Black / African / Caribbean / Black British

- African
- Caribbean
- Any other Black / African / Caribbean background

Other ethnic group

- Arab
- Any other ethnic group

Do you consider yourself to have a disability?

Yes No

What happens next?

Your feedback to this consultation will be presented to the Westmorland and Furness Council Cabinet in February for a final decision.

If you require any further information, contact budget@westmorlandandfurness.gov.uk.





Levens CE School, Kendal





Translation Services

If you require this document in another format (e.g. CD, audio cassette, Braille or large type) or in another language, please telephone:
0300 303 2992.

আপনি যদি এই তথ্য আপনার নিজের ভাষায় পেতে চান তাহলে অনুগ্রহ করে 0300 303 2992 নম্বরে টেলিফোন করুন।

如果您希望通过母语了解此信息，
请致电 0300 303 2992

Jeigu norétumėte gauti šią informaciją savo kalba,
skambinkite telefonu 0300 303 2992

W celu uzyskania informacji w Państwa języku proszę
zatelefonować pod numer 0300 303 2992

Se quiser aceder a esta informação na sua língua,
telefone para o 0300 303 2992

Bu bilgiyi kendi dilinizde görmek istiyorsanız lütfen
0300 303 2992 numaralı telefonu arayınız

