

# Balanced Budget 2026/27: Consultation findings

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Due to the fact Exeter City Council expect to be able to put forward a balanced budget for 2026-27 without having to consider cutting or reducing services, the format of this consultation was different to last years.

Instead, we wanted to get a picture of what was important to residents in relation to:

- ✓ Local Economy
- ✓ People
- ✓ Homes
- ✓ Sustainable Environment
- ✓ A Well-run Council

To do this we asked people to rank their priorities for these 5 focus areas, giving us quantitative data. We also asked people for their opinions on these 5 focus areas through free text responses, giving us qualitative data.

Additionally, people we also asked to feedback via free text what they feel should be protected from any potential future cuts, and what they felt should be more open to future cost savings/ reductions.

We have displayed this feedback below, demonstrating what people thought was most important to them through the quantitative data, and theming responses from the qualitative data.

Moreover, we have also linked this feedback (where relevant to do so) to the information and data provided in the 2025 Resident Survey.

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It should be noted that 58 people took part in the Balanced Budget 2026/27 survey and a total of 1882 people took part in the 2025 Resident Survey.

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## **Local Economy: Priorities and Key Themes**

Respondents ranked these options in order of priority for the local economy, with number 1 being the highest priority.

1. Supporting independent shops and reducing empty retail units
2. Improving access to employment and skills
3. Attracting new businesses to Exeter
4. Community Safety Initiatives
5. Investing in cultural and tourism events and facilities

These themes come from all free text comments relating to the local economy:

### **1. City Centre Vitality & Footfall**

- Reduce parking charges; make parking free after certain times.
- Encourage visitors and shoppers with cleaner streets and safer public spaces.
- Support independent shops and fill empty units.
- Address antisocial behaviour that deters footfall.

### **2. Business & Development**

- Accelerate planning decisions and make development easier (e.g., disused sites).
- Support local SMEs through procurement rules rather than large consultancies.
- Promote street markets and cultural attractions as economic drivers.

### **3. Housing's Role in the Economy**

- More truly affordable housing to support workforce retention.
- Better use of empty properties; convert unused spaces above shops.
- Prioritise local residents over students; apply stronger rules to student developers.

### **4. Tourism & Cultural Economy**

- Invest in culture, museums, markets, murals, heritage, and green spaces.
- Consider introducing a tourist tax for hotel visitors.

### **5. Transport Infrastructure**

- Improve public transport reliability to support the economy.
- Park & Ride expansion, better cycling infrastructure, congestion reduction.

## **People: Priorities and Key Themes**

Respondents ranked these options in order of priority for people, (e.g. communities, wellbeing and social inclusion), with number 1 being the highest priority.

1. Supporting vulnerable groups and families
2. Reducing health inequalities
3. Maintaining Community buildings and facilities
4. Supporting community resilience and inclusion
5. Improving access to leisure and cultural activities

These themes come from all free text comments relating to people, communities, wellbeing and social inclusion:

### **1. Youth & Teen Provision**

- More youth clubs, teen activities, safe spaces, library/RAMM programmes.
- Concern over cuts to youth work and SEND support.

### **2. Support for Vulnerable Groups**

- Homeless outreach, addiction support, relocation of some services outside main shopping areas.
- More community builders and community initiatives.
- Better SEND services and support for families.

### **3. Accessibility & Inclusion**

- Make public consultations easier; offer non-digital options.
- More welcoming events for autistic/ASD residents.
- More services for immigrant, trans and queer communities.

### **4. Community Pride & Local Spaces**

- Cleaner streets, graffiti removal, weeding, better parks.
- Support community-run groups, neighbourhood collaboration and face-to-face contact.

### **5. Safety**

- Tackle street drinking and antisocial behaviour, especially Sidwell/South Street.
- Improve evening safety and city centre enforcement.

## **Homes: Priorities and Key Themes**

Respondents ranked these options in order of priority related to homes, with number 1 being the highest priority.

1. Building more affordable and social housing
2. Providing temporary accommodation to prevent homelessness
3. Improving housing standards and energy efficiency
4. Funding disabled facilities and warm home grants
5. Supporting tenants and landlords

These themes come from all free text comments relating to homes:

### **1. More Social & Affordable Housing**

- Build more council homes; reduce homelessness.
- Ensure affordability for local residents, not just students or high-income earners.
- Use empty homes; repurpose underused buildings.

### **2. Quality & Maintenance of Existing Housing Stock**

- Address damp, mould, asbestos; improve MEARS responsiveness for housing tenants.
- Improve maintenance and estate management.
- Ensure adapted homes for disabled residents are available and well-managed.

### **3. Housing Allocation & Planning Policy**

- Stop prioritising developers who fail on affordable housing obligations.
- Ensure families or vulnerable residents are placed appropriately.
- Reduce over-focus on co-living blocks and student accommodation.

### **4. Infrastructure Must Match Housing Growth**

- Doctors, schools, roads, transport must come with new developments.
- Concern that rapid housing expansion increases flooding risk.

### **5. Financial & Policy Measures**

- Higher charges for second/third homes.
- Stricter enforcement on private landlords.
- Consider congestion or visitor taxes to support housing investment.

# **Sustainable Environmental: Priorities and Key Themes**

Respondents ranked these options in order of priority for a sustainable environment, with number 1 being the highest priority.

1. Enhancing green spaces and biodiversity
2. Having cleaner streets
3. Improving recycling rates
4. Reducing carbon emissions from Council buildings and services
5. Expanding electric vehicle infrastructure

These themes come from all free text comments relating to a sustainable environment priorities:

## **1. Cleanliness & Public Realm**

- Better street cleaning; weed control; litter removal.
- More bins; improved waste management.

## **2. Green Spaces, Biodiversity & Planting**

- Plant more trees; living walls; rooftop gardens; biodiversity improvements.
- Protect parks and play areas; improve maintenance of green spaces.
- Better river care and environmental stewardship.

## **3. Active Travel & Transport Sustainability**

- More cycle lanes, safer cycling, secure bike storage.
- Encourage walking and cycling over cars.
- Concerns about poorly implemented LTN changes.
- Public transport must improve to support sustainability.

## **4. Recycling & Waste**

- Glass recycling from homes.
- Transparency on what happens to recycled waste.
- Reduce use of weed-control chemicals.

## **5. Energy & Buildings**

- Support for solar panels and energy efficiency improvements.
- Clarify council vs. government responsibilities on energy improvements.

## A Well-Run Council: Priorities and Key Themes

Respondents ranked these options in order of priority for a well-run council, with number 1 being the highest priority.

1. Engaging residents and including them in decision-making
2. Ensuring transparency and accountability
3. Enhancing customer service and responsiveness
4. Improving the accessibility of Council information
5. Expanding online and self-service options (e.g. MyExeter)

These themes come from all free text comments relating a well-run council:

### **1. Transparency & Trust**

- Increase openness around planning decisions, housing partnerships, finances.
- Share clearer explanations of decisions and consultation outcomes.
- Address perception that consultation is “tick-box” or disingenuous.

### **2. Accessibility & Customer Service**

- More face-to-face support; less reliance on online systems.
- Improve MyExeter portal; allow council tax visibility online.
- Quicker response times; better communication channels.

### **3. Staff Culture & Accountability**

- More visible presence in communities.
- Concerns about senior roles being ineffective or detached.
- Improve diversity training and customer focus.

### **4. Operational Basics**

- Focus on core services: street cleaning, bins, parks.
- Improve procurement processes; avoid inefficient spending.

### **5. Partnership Working**

- Clarify responsibilities between ECC, DCC, NHS, and voluntary sector.
- Work better with police on ASB and with transport operators.

## **Areas to Protect from Budget Cuts: Key Themes**

These themes come from all free text comments relating to protecting areas from potential future budget cuts:

### **1. Core Environmental & Public Realm Services**

- Street cleaning, refuse collection, parks, green spaces.
  - These are seen as essential for city pride, safety and economy.

### **2. Vulnerable People & Social Care**

- Homelessness support, social care, SEND services, youth work.
  - Many emphasise protecting vulnerable residents over other services.

### **3. Culture & Libraries**

- RAMM, libraries, leisure centres, community groups.
  - It is felt these spaces build community resilience and sense of belonging.

### **4. Housing Support**

- Maintenance of council housing; tackling damp, mould, poor landlords.
  - Affordable housing programmes.

### **5. Public Transport**

- Essential for reducing congestion and ensuring equitable access.

## **Where Reductions or Charges Might Be Acceptable: Key Themes**

These themes come from all free text comments relating to what respondents may be willing to see reduced or charged for in Exeter, to help balance future budgets:

**budget in future years:**

### **1. Increased Charges (Rather than making cuts)**

- Higher parking permits.
- Some increases to museum or leisure fees if means-tested.
- Fees for planning applications, pest control, or certain recycling services.

## **2. Reductions in Select Areas**

- Reduce police funding slightly to invest in transport.
- Less spending on non-statutory partnership projects (e.g., with university).
- Review inclusion & diversity budgets (not universally supported but repeated).

## **3. Efficiency Savings**

- Cut excessive management layers and councillor expenses.
- Improve procurement efficiency.
- Audit spending on non-essential departments.

## **4. Waste & Recycling Adjustments**

- Explore if some residents are willing to accept reduced refuse collections (e.g., monthly black bins).

## **5. Charging Visitors & Second Homes**

- Tourist tax.
- Increased charges on second/third homes and HMOs

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## **Areas of crossover with 2025 Resident Survey**

### **1. Trust, transparency and acting on resident concerns**

#### **Crossover:**

Both datasets highlight a trust gap, especially around:

- Acting on resident concerns
- Transparency of decision-making
- Feedback and communication quality

### **2. Keeping residents informed and accessible information**

#### **Crossover:**

Both identify a need for clearer, more inclusive communication, especially for:

- Older residents

- Residents with disabilities
- Those who feel digitally excluded

### **3. Safety and antisocial behaviour (ABS)**

#### **Crossover:**

Community safety and ASB are major shared concerns, especially relating to:

- City centre (Sidwell Street, High Street, South Street)
- Evening safety
- Substance misuse/ addiction

### **4. Cleanliness, litter and green space**

#### **Crossover:**

Both reflect widespread concern across:

- Street cleaning
- Waste and litter
- Maintenance issues (weeds, graffiti)
- Protection and enhancement of green spaces & biodiversity

### **5. Housing, affordability and homelessness support**

#### **Crossover:**

Both sets of data highlight concern about:

- Homelessness support
- Availability of affordable/social housing
- Housing quality and maintenance
- Use of empty homes and redevelopment

### **6. City Centre vitality and business environment**

#### **Crossover:**

Strong shared emphasis on:

- Supporting independent businesses
- Addressing ASB to drive footfall

- Improving cleanliness/safety to make the city centre more welcoming
- Investment in culture to revitalise the centre