

# Equality Impact Assessment Report

## Purpose

<b>What is being reviewed?</b>	Proposed Council Budget for 2025/2026
<b>Service Lead and Service Unit:</b>	Adam Richens – Chief Finance Officer and Director of Finance
<b>People involved in EIA process:</b>	<p>At an individual savings level which has informed this EIA:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Corporate and Service Directors across the council and other officers where applicable including Heads of Service.</li><li>• Cabinet Members</li></ul> <p>From an overarching assessment level for this EIA:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Sophie Bradfield – Principal Policy &amp; Strategy Officer and Service Unit Equality Champion</li><li>• Vicky Edmonds – Senior Research Officer and Service Unit Equality Champion</li></ul>
<b>Conversation dates where equalities was considered:</b>	May 2024 – January 2025

## Background

This Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) evaluates the potential impacts of the 2025/2026 proposed budget on various protected characteristics as defined by the Equality Act 2010. The assessment aims to ensure that the budget-setting process considers the diverse needs of all local communities and workforce, and that any potential negative impacts are identified and mitigated.

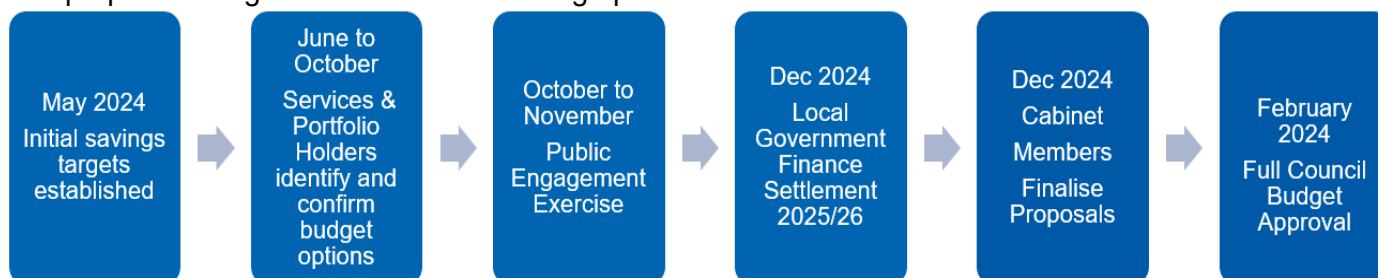
This is an overarching high-level assessment which is underpinned by a series of EIAs completed for individual savings proposals, where they are identified as having an impact on protected groups.

### 2025/26 Budget

All local authorities are facing substantial financial challenges, with rises in inflation and the continued cost of living crisis. Regardless, the council has a legal responsibility to set an annual balanced budget (Local Government Finance Act 1992).

The 2025/2026 budget aims to address the financial challenges faced by the council whilst continuing to provide essential services to residents. The council's budget is spent across a number of key areas. The 2024/2025 split can be viewed in the graph on the following page. All service areas were reviewed for efficiencies and potential savings.

The proposed budget has followed a thorough process:



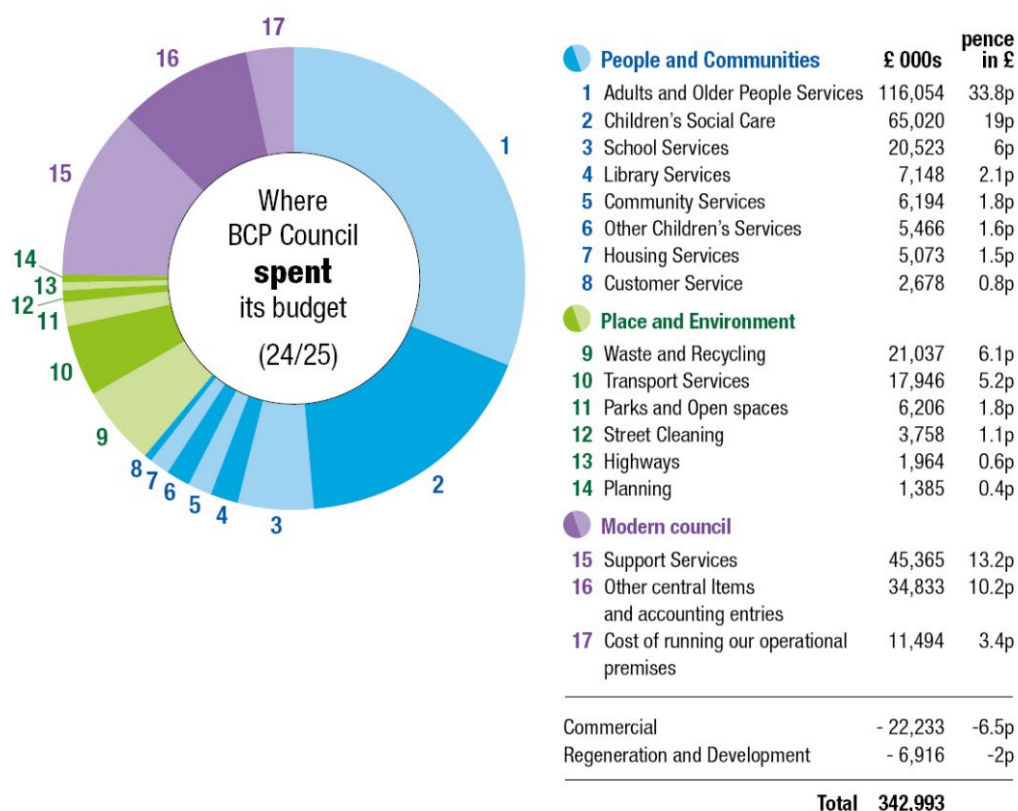
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The financial strategy employed by the council in setting the 2025/2025 budget ensures the overall financial resilience of the council, to continue to sustainably provide essential services to the most vulnerable people in society who are reliant on the council to achieve a good standard of living.

The financial strategy looked at twenty different workstreams including priorities set out in the Corporate Strategy to work closely with partners, remove barriers and empower others. This was achieved by reviewing the extent to which the community would be better placed to manage council assets, and the services delivered within them through volunteers and other sources of funding.

The proposed 2025/2026 budget includes £7.8m of savings, efficiencies, and additional income generation required to set a legally balanced budget and support a financially sustainable council. The proposed budget for 2025/26 also includes a 4.99% increase in council tax, which can be broken down into a 2.99% basic increase and a 2% uplift for the Adult Social Care (ASC) precept.

How BCP Council spent its budget in 2024/2025:



## Equality Assessment

The Public Sector Equality Duty does not prevent the council from making difficult decisions when required to achieve significant levels of savings across all services. It supports robust, fair, transparent and accountable decision-making that considers the diverse needs of local communities and the workforce.

The EIA process has involved reviewing and analysing a number of proposed savings to understand the potential impact of proposals. Only those most appropriate have been put forward for the 2025-26 budget. Individual EIAs have been completed where a potential negative impact has been identified to ensure mitigating actions are considered and utilised. These assessments have considered the potential impacts on protected characteristics, including age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation.

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Findings from a consultation with residents and businesses has also informed the final budget proposal for 2025/2026.

A corporate EIA conversation took place looking at all the savings proposals from a wider perspective alongside the views of residents, to capture any potential cumulative impacts on protected groups.

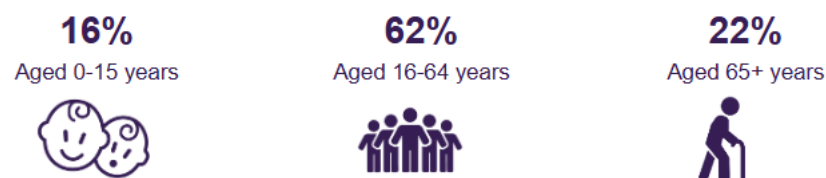
## Findings

In considering equality impacts, it is important to understand the demographic profile of service users. For the budget as a whole, this is the residents that live across Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole. This has been reviewed from two angles: protected characteristics as set out in the Equality Act 2010, and the Equality and Human Rights Commission's six equality domains.

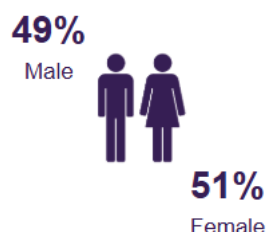
### Equality data for the BCP area

Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole has a large resident population, with a total population of around 404,050. The area has the 8<sup>th</sup> highest population of all unitary authorities in England and this number continues to rise, driven by net migration. The area has the following demographic profile based on protected characteristics:

#### Age



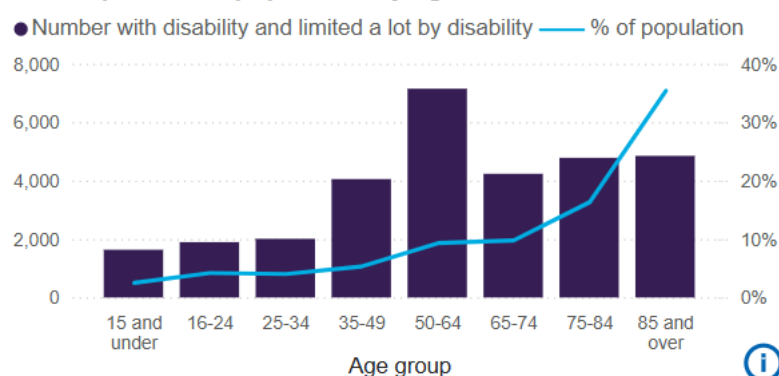
#### Sex



#### Disability



Number who are disabled and limited a lot by their disability, and as percent of population by age, BCP 2021 Census



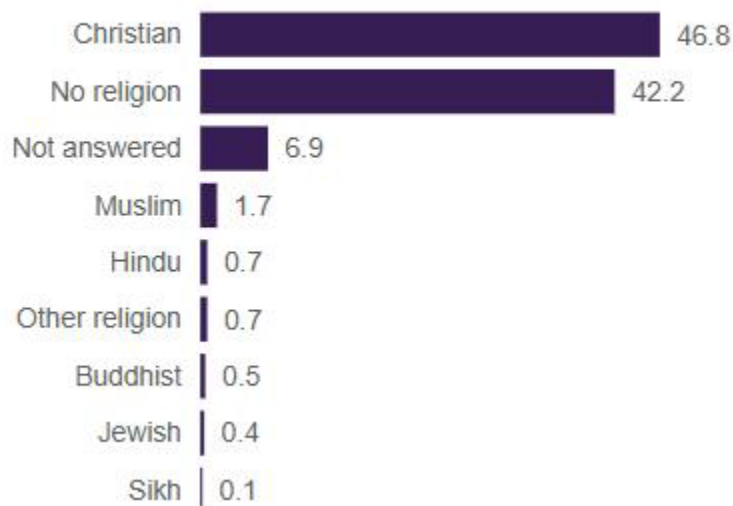
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## Race

The BCP area has a diverse community with 82% of the population from a white British background, and 18% from a non-white British background. Over 80 languages are spoken across the BCP area. The population has become more diverse since the last census when 88% of the population were white British.

## Religion or belief

### 2021 Census Religion (%)

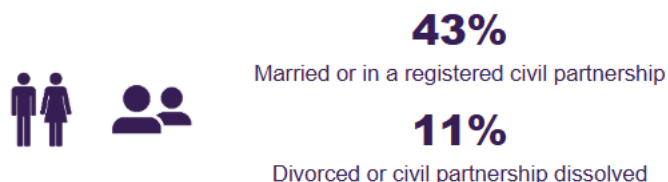


## Sexual orientation

### Sexual orientation by number and percentage of usual residents aged 16+ in BCP, 2021 Census

Sexual orientation	Percent	Value
Bisexual	1.6	5,358.0
Gay or Lesbian	1.9	6,494.0
Not answered	7.6	25,580.0
Other sexual orientations	0.3	1,221.0
Straight or Heterosexual	88.5	296,257.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>99.9</b>	<b>334,910.0</b>

## Marriage and civil partnership



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The Equality and Human Rights Commission has a measurement framework using six domains which reflect the capabilities or areas of life that are important to people and that enable them to flourish. Information about the communities within the BCP area is also provided under each of these domains.

## Education

- **Children have good educational achievement** - There are 98 state-funded schools, comprised of 66 primaries, 21 secondary schools, 4 all-through schools and 7 special schools. 88.7% of schools are rated Good or Outstanding for overall effectiveness. Educational attainment for all key stages is above the national average.
- **Nearly a third of residents are qualified to degree level** - In 2021, 16% of residents aged over 16 have no qualifications, 32% are qualified to degree level or above and 6% have an apprenticeship qualification.
- **A university region by the sea** - There are around 22,700 students registered at three universities in the BCP area.

## Work

- **An economy where over 60% aged 16 or over are economically active** - The employment rate is slightly lower at 58%. In the year to September 2022, the unemployment rate was 4.0%, compared to the national rate of 3.7%. Around 132,700 people aged 16 or over are economically inactive, with over 36% between the ages of 16 and 64. Most of the working-age inactive population (16-64) are students (27%), followed by 24% who are long-term sick, 19% who are caring for family/home, and nearly 15% who are retired.
- **Over four out of five businesses are micro businesses** - In 2022, there were 15,555 businesses in Bournemouth, Christchurch, and Poole. The majority (89%) were micro-businesses with less than 10 employees, compared to 90% in England.
- **Wages are below the national average** - Currently, 62% of the total resident population is of working age. The median yearly salary for BCP residents and workers is somewhat lower than the national average. Residents in the BCP area earn £31,600 per year, while those working in the BCP area earn £31,700 per year. The UK average is £33,000.

## Living Standards

- **An area with significant contrasts** - BCP Council has areas which are among the most and least deprived in the country. 15,900 people (4% of the BCP population) live in the 10% most deprived areas in England. This increases to 45,200 people (11% of the BCP population) when we look at the number of people living in the 20% most deprived areas. 83,800 (21% of the BCP population) live in the 20% least deprived areas in England.
- **House prices are higher than the national average** - Average house prices in the BCP area have increased significantly in the last ten years. The average house price in the BCP area was £417,500 in the 12 months to end December 2022; this is higher than the average price regionally and nationally. The relative affordability of property has decreased between 2012 and 2022. Median house prices increased at a higher rate than the median wage, which has led to an increase in the affordability ratio (less affordable housing).
- **The rising cost of living is increasing the financial strain on households** - Households with young adults, ethnic minorities, children, people with disabilities, or those claiming Universal Credit are disproportionately affected.

## Health

- **A healthy population** - Overall health and wellbeing are as good as or better than the national average. Both life expectancy and healthy life expectancy are higher in the BCP area than nationally. However, the difference between life expectancy and healthy life expectancy indicates people in the area may live on average 15-18 years in poor health.
- **An ageing population** - The number of residents aged 65 and over is set to increase by 15% between 2018-2028. By 2028, 24% of the local population will be aged 65+.

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## Justice and personal security

- **High levels of resident satisfaction with the local area, where the majority of residents feel safe** - In the latest 2021 residents' surveys, the majority of BCP Council residents (84%) reported being satisfied with the local area as a place to live. 66% of resident survey respondents said they felt safe in their local area after dark and 94% said they feel safe during the day.

## Participation

- High levels of car access - There are 813 miles of roads across the BCP area. 81% of households within the BCP area have one or more cars in the Household.

## Summary of budget consultation outcome with residents and businesses'

Engaging and consulting service users is a key aspect of assessing potential or actual equality impacts.

To inform the budget proposal, an open consultation took place from 21 October to 29 November to understand local views on the importance of council services and priorities for council spending as well as levels of council tax. The consultation was widely promoted through a press release and social media channels. The consultation was also sent to residents and stakeholders who had signed up to the council's consultation register. The consultation was available online and in paper form to ensure a number of accessible options were available. An additional representative sample survey was undertaken to ensure responses reflected all the protected characteristics and backgrounds of residents across Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole, with a quota to meet on sex, age, ethnicity and deprivation. The data was weighted to improve its representativeness. Overall, a total of 1,226 responses were received to the open consultation and 750 for the sample survey.

Analysis shows most respondents would like the council to retain the same level of funding for most of its services. If savings need to be made, then respondents expect the council to make this from looking at the cost of running its premises, back-office functions and other central items and accounting. Residents want the council to prioritise frontline services. There are some frontline services where residents would like to increase spending, for the sample survey this was school services and children's social care and for the open survey it was highway services.

The following services were highlighted as a priority for residents and businesses':

- Affordable decent housing
- Community safety and anti-social behaviour
- Helping people who are homeless
- Maintaining roads and pavements
- Providing adult social care services
- Providing children's social care services
- Supporting schools and education

The majority of respondents also wanted council tax levels to be increased below 4.99%. Residents expect the council to keep any council tax level increases to a minimum.

More information is available here: [Budget 2025/26 | Have Your Say Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole](#)



## Equality Impact of the 2025/2026 Budget

This EIA is based on information made available for consideration during the budget process and provides a high-level assessment of equality considerations. Further information and detail has been analysed on a service level, under each individual saving and where applicable, separate EIAs have been carried out.

The savings and efficiencies as part of the 2025/2026 budget can be categorised into the following 5 areas:

- Fees and charges
- Recharges
- Service efficiency
- Service reduction
- Service transformation

All savings are in line with legislation and statutory requirements and where impacts have been identified these have carefully been assessed at a more detailed level in individual equality impacts assessments with mitigating actions in place.

### Service efficiency and transformation

Based on the information provided, service efficiency and transformation has been taken to mean there will not be a reduction in service. This is because service efficiencies and transformation seek to improve service delivery so there are no negative impacts on service users identified from proposals that fall under these areas. Instead positive impacts have been identified, including for older people and those with disabilities, for example through better care setting options, which means independence of individuals is maintained for longer.

There may however be negative and positive impacts on the workforce through continuing transformation programmes in Adult Social Care and Children's Services along with ongoing work to reduce the head count of the authority as a whole. Individual equality impact assessments have or will be carried out where this is the case with appropriate mitigating actions put in place. Work being undertaken to transform services supports resident feedback of prioritising frontline services and looking at back-office functions.

### Service reduction

The scale of the ongoing challenges faced by BCP Council and all other local authorities means that difficult choices concerning service changes must be made to ensure a legally balanced budget for 2025/26. Although focused primarily on discretionary services, consideration has also been given to statutory services and reducing service levels towards the statutory minimum.

Where savings have been made in service reductions, decisions have been made based on service user data available and to ensure service provision still meets statutory minimum levels. Mitigating actions have been reviewed as part of individual equality impact assessments. For example, where proposals look at a reduction in cash machines maintained by the council in favour of digital methods, consultation has or will be undertaken and mitigating actions will be considered for service users without access to cashless alternatives, which could include older age groups and those from low socio-economic groups.

### Fees and charges and recharges

The budget assumes that all locally set fees and charges will be increased at least in line with inflation and/or be adjusted to ensure they are set at a level which guarantees full cost recovery including the impact of the National Living Wage set for 2025/26 and the increase to Employers National Insurance costs.

Where fees and charges have been increased or recharges made, an acknowledgement has been made of the impact to those from low socio-economic groups and those hit hardest by the cost of living. Benchmarking has been carried out to ensure the council's charges are in line with the public sector and

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private sector where applicable. The income generated from fees and charges goes back into maintenance or service delivery which benefits all service users.

## Mitigating actions for potential negative impacts:

Responsible officers to:

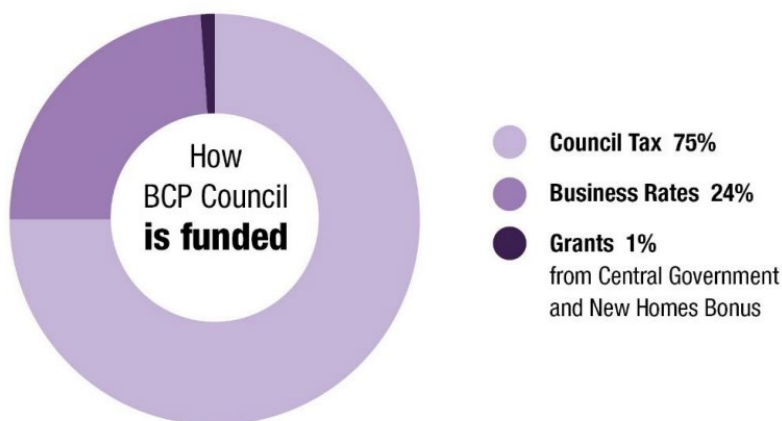
- a) ensure that decisions are accompanied and informed by individual EIA's with appropriate engagement and consultation with affected groups and in doing so, consciously consider the objectives under the Public Sector Equality Duty, to:
  - i. eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Equality Act 2010
  - ii. advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it
  - iii. foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
- b) regularly monitor and evaluate outcomes resulting from budget decisions, with a focus on protected characteristics, so strategies can be adjusted as needed
- c) continue engaging with residents and stakeholders to understand their needs and priorities.

## Council Tax

The council is seeking to increase council tax by 4.99%. It has not been possible to meet the requests of respondents to the budget consultation on lower council tax increase levels whilst also achieving a balanced budget.

Government policy to fund cost pressures in local government is primarily through the ability to raise council tax, including the social care precept. The council's expenditure must align with the resources at its disposal.

Council tax has a direct correlation to the quality and scope of service provision, as it makes up the majority of the council's income. The graph below shows how the council was funded in 2024/2025.



The majority of the council's money is spent providing life changing support for some of the most vulnerable – including older people, people with disabilities and children who need support and protection. Like other local authorities across the country, BCP Council is facing significant pressures on its budget. The cost of living is affecting fuel prices, food, and energy costs, which means services like waste collection, street lighting, and the resources that keep the most vulnerable adults and children safe, are all becoming more expensive to run.

As noted previously, the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) does not prevent the council from making difficult decisions when required to achieve significant levels of savings across all services in meeting a balanced budget. The PSED supports robust, fair, transparent and accountable decision-making that considers the diverse needs of local communities and the council's workforce.



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In comparison to other unitary councils, BCP Council has a council tax level which is below the national average.

## Equality impact:

**Negative:** It is likely that residents on lower earnings will be affected negatively by the increase. An increase in council tax will negatively impact on households already struggling financially which is not necessarily limited to just lower socio-economic groups given the ongoing cost of living challenges.

**Positive:** Increasing council tax also enables the council to continue to provide vital services that support the most vulnerable in society including older and younger residents and those with disabilities, as well as services which support all residents to live in sustainable, safe and healthy communities.

## Mitigating actions:

There are several schemes in place to assist residents with their council tax bills. These include:

- a) Council tax Support: Residents on lower incomes can apply for assistance with their council tax bill by applying for council tax Support, further information is available on the council's website: <https://www.bcpCouncil.gov.uk/benefits-support-and-advice/council-tax-support>
- b) Council tax Discounts and exemptions: Discounts are available to residents in certain circumstances including care leavers, carers, those with severe mental impairment, single adults in a household and students. Further details of ways in which council tax could be reduced for qualifying households is available on the website: [Council Tax discounts and exemptions | BCP](#)
- c) Discretionary Reduction and Help with Paying Council Tax Bill: Section 13A (1c) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 allows local authorities to, in exceptional circumstances, reduce the council tax liability for a charge payer. Statutory exemptions and discounts must first have been exhausted.

## Conclusion

### Summary of Equality Implications

BCP Council has a duty to be prudent in the administration of the funds it holds as well as to consider the interests of the community which benefits from the services it provides. The council's proposed budget for 2025/2026 aims to address financial challenges whilst seeking to maintain appropriate services for the most vulnerable as well as improve the sustainability of services important for the wellbeing of all residents.

The impacts of the council budget for 2025/26 have been assessed considering the nine protected characteristics (age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation) as well as further characteristics including low socio-economic status, carers and care leavers. The Equality and Human Rights Commission's six domains of equality measurement framework have also been considered, identified as the areas of life that are important to people and that enable them to flourish. These are: Education, Work, Living standards, Health, Justice and personal security, and Participation.

The voices of residents and businesses' have been included through consultation carried out as part of the budget setting process.

The process has identified potential equality impacts on protected characteristics, recommended mitigating actions, and strived to ensure fairness, transparency, and accountability in decision-making.

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## **Positive Impacts:**

- Transformation of services to improve service delivery including in Adult Social Care and Children's Social Care will positively impact service users who are some of the most vulnerable in the BCP area. This includes older and younger residents and those with disabilities.
- As part of the budget, council tax is being raised to support increased service provision, which will have a positive impact on many residents across different protected groups.

## **Negative Impacts:**

- An increase in council tax may negatively affect households already struggling financially, impacting low-income families as well as older and disabled residents.

## **Mitigating Actions:**

- Council tax support schemes are available for residents on lower incomes including discounts and exemptions for specific groups, such as care leavers, carers, and single adults. Section 13A (1c) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 also allows for discretionary reductions in exceptional circumstances.

The cumulative impact of the proposals indicates that low-income households and individuals will be most negatively affected, followed by older age groups and disabled people. However, the investments and mitigating actions aim to support these groups and promote equality within the community.

Individual equality impact assessments have or will be carried out to support individual savings where a potential negative impact has been identified for service users or the workforce. This will ensure conscious consideration is given to the Public Sector Equality Duty and mitigating actions are put in place to minimise any potential or actual negative impacts.