



Winchester City Council March 2025

Budget Meeting

At the Full Council Meeting on the 27th February the Council's Budget for the next financial year was approved. Budget meetings are usually gruelling with last minute amendments appearing, extending the meeting into the small hours. We were spared this time.

The council's immediate financial position is stable. However, as with many local authorities, it faces increasing budget pressure long term, which it is addressing through its transformation programme, focusing on reviewing contracts, creating an effective and efficient digital service and generating more income.

'Going Greener Faster' continues to be very much the basis for the Council Plan 2025-2030 as revised and agreed in January. Particular highlights are:

- Despite the possible financial threats over the horizon the Council is going to award a contract for retrofit work to improve the energy efficiency of their housing stock of £4.3 m per year for the next three years.
- We are continuing with our social housing programme with funds of £237.7 to be spend over the next 10 years, to meet their target of 1000 new homes.
- £135,000 additional budget for the costs of providing the food waste collection programme. The collection of food waste and its processing in bio-digesters will further reduce the carbon footprint of the district, by an estimated 1,900 tons per year.
- £460,000 one-off budget to fund the phased roll out of the food waste service from October 2025.
- £200,000 to be invested in resources for planning enforcement.
- £425,000 to be allocated for funding the next Local Plan requirement. (The current local plan is currently under review by the Planning Inspectorate, but the Government requires an up-dated version to meet new housing figures.)
- £2m to be allocated from reserves to the Property Reserve to fund maintenance of corporate properties.

There continue to be budget uncertainties as the Government Funding review for local governments has yet to report. Not being sure of the council income for more than one year makes efficient financial planning difficult.

Local Government Re-organisation

A great deal of the energy of councillors and officers continues to be burnt up dealing with the Local Government re-organisation. The issue of a single unitary authority covering Hampshire is comparatively easy compared with the task of addressing the next level of local authorities. The Government wants to have more logical and consistent boundaries with similar populations. They seek to iron out the many anomalies that exist. This is not at all easy to achieve, given that the logic of economics, transport corridors, employment, housing space, are very often in conflict, not to mention human emotions. Many of the parish boundaries are very ancient. (The parish of Silchester has a length of boundary that is Roman!) At its simplest, Winchester forms a magnet for Alresford and the



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villages of the Itchen Valley and others that lie around it. Places like Bishops Waltham and Wickham are pulled more economically towards the Solent. Quite how lines drawn on a county map can create new administrative boundaries with creating more anomalies to be resolved remains to be seen.

To revert to financial matters, Winchester's has a balanced budget this year and in the near future. Some neighbouring districts have huge debts and others lack financial transparency. The Government says there are no funds to support the financially careless, or indeed those like Hampshire County Council loaded with hugely expensive statutory duties which will be some of those of the Unitary Councils.

There will be further opportunities to hear about local issues as the reorganisation process evolves, we recommend that you listen in to any available, they will be found at [Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation - Winchester City Council](#)

The proposals for how we move to the next stage have now been published, as attached.

Postal Vote Renewal exercise

The Elections Act 2022 introduced changes to the way people apply for a postal vote for applications received from 31 October 2023: all postal vote applications must contain the applicant's name, address, date of birth, national insurance number and signature

- the applicant's identity must be verified against records held by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). If this identity check fails, the applicant must provide evidence of their identity
- postal votes are now valid for a maximum of 3 years

All postal voters, who applied before 31 October 2023, must re-apply for their postal vote by 31 January 2026 in order to remain a postal voter.

We currently have over 17,000 voters who need to re-apply, so we have started the renewal process early to allow voters time to re-apply and The Electoral Registration Team time to process the applications in advance of any scheduled elections.

Anyone who does not respond to this request will receive another invitation, closer to the postal vote expiry date of 31 January 2026. If they do not re-apply by the expiry date the postal vote will be cancelled.

We are contacting all affected postal voters now to ask them to re-apply for their postal vote as soon as possible.

The quickest and easiest way to renew is to [reapply for a postal vote online](#).

With the changes, voters will have the option to apply for an absent vote through a new online system provided by the UK Government for UK parliamentary general elections in England, Scotland and Wales, local government election in England, and Police and Crime Commissioner elections in England and Wales.

This will be a similar process as registering to vote, and voters will need to provide their National Insurance number, as well as their signature. The UK Government is responsible for delivering and launching this new system.

We will send a letter or email to all affected postal voters in batches commencing March 2025.



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So that electors can spot a genuine email from us:

- the email title will be **Request for postal vote reapplication**
- the sender will be eregcanvass@winchester.gov.uk

Some members of the same household may be contacted in different ways depending on whether we have an email address or not.

We are using emails where a voter has provided an email address to reduce the cost of sending letters by post.

Margot Power 01962 734167

Russell Gordon -Smith 01962 733219

Clare Pinniger 07790 032349