

**Responses to the Council's Budget (Medium Term Financial Plan) 2023/24 -
2026/27 Recommendations 230104-54-1 to 230104-54-5**

230104-54-1

To ensure that the budget consultation is presented to scrutiny committees in December in future years, as is usual practice

Earlier attendance at Scrutiny will be in our plans for the next budget round.

230104-54-2

To commit to going out to consultation earlier, as is usual practice

Earlier consultation launch will be in our plans for the next budget round.

230104-54-3

To provide information on whether voluntary organisations have been approached with regard to managing the Shop Mobility, and an assessment of whether this is achievable

A proposal to withdraw the Shopmobility service with effect from April 2023 was put forward as part of the budget setting process for 2023-24. The withdrawal would presently save the Council £41,000 per annum.

The Public Transport Service Area undertook a consultation process that actively sought feedback on the proposal to close Shopmobility. The consultation took place from 13th December 2022 until 27th January 2023.

At the time of the consultation starting in December, there were 207 active members registered. 90 (43%) of them are City residents and 117 (57%) are non-City residents. Members were sent a questionnaire or spoken to when using the service, and 42 responses were received.

In addition to service users, a number of organisations were approached, including Nottingham BID, Disability Inclusion Group (DIG), Disability Nottinghamshire, Nottingham Community and Voluntary Service (NCVS) and other Shopmobility operations in Derby, Arnold and West Bridgford.

The key points from engaging other organisations were

- Nottingham BID do not have funds available to run the service.
- Charities and other schemes were approached and, so far, the only one to respond was Derby Shopmobility.

We continue to explore other routes to achieving similar outcomes.

Transferring the scheme to a charity is likely to be very difficult as organisations contacted have not expressed an interest in the taking on the service, and setting up a new charity operation would take a considerable time, having to find willing trustees to manage the organisation and take on responsibility for operating the service. It is very likely that funding will still be required for the on-going maintenance and acquisition of equipment, as well as new rental costs from April 2023, and so

even if a charity could be formed, the proposed saving would be unlikely to materialise. Charging for use would act as a deterrent to some degree, as users already have to pay for any parking over two hours (£4.10), and with an average of five users a day, a model which relied on significant income from the scheme is unlikely to be a viable way forward.

Models established elsewhere that are based on charities and charging have been developed over a long period of time. Based on the above, it is difficult to see a model that can be introduced in the short to medium term that would allow savings to be made and achieve value for money.

The shopping centre receives the benefit of increased custom, so we are keen to explore with them how the service might be maintained with no ongoing cost to the council.

230104-54-4

To ensure that the necessary levels of senior staff are recruited to and retained in the finance division

Short term use of interims allows us to develop, consult on and implement an appropriate staffing structure for an improved finance function whilst sustaining capacity for the financial improvements we need to make in short order.

Fundamental to the medium to long term achievement of good financial management, is the redesign of the Finance Service to establish sufficient professionally capable capacity to lead and sustain strong financial discipline which facilitates and enables the Council to deliver services that meet its objectives within available resources and represent value for money. A draft Target Operating Model is in development. This will be developed and taken forward in the coming months with a timeline to develop, cost, implement and recruit to the revised staffing structure as soon as possible during 2023.

In the meantime there will be a continued dependency upon interim staff resources in order to cover vacancies and deliver Business As Usual (BAU) activities such as 2022/23 accounts closure, in year budget monitoring and budget development for 2024/25 as well as to provide additional capacity to deliver on the improvement milestones in the Financial Improvement Plan.

230104-54-5

To actively review fees and charges on an ongoing basis, and in a timely manner

This is the intention behind the Fees and Charges work – to provide a ‘self-service’ and robust framework for service areas to regularly benchmark and assess the suitability of their fees in relation to true service costs, local authority peers and any relevant local context.