

CPC Budget 2026/27 **Summary Report to Full Council**

Purpose: To recommend approval of the 2026/27 Revenue Budget and Precept to Full Council

1. Introduction

This report presents the proposed Executive Revenue Budget for the financial year 2026/27 as recommended by the Finance & Governance Committee. The budget has been prepared to ensure the Council can continue to deliver its statutory responsibilities and priority services while maintaining financial sustainability and adequate reserves.

2. Budget Overview

The proposed 2026/27 budget has been developed using prudent assumptions on income, expenditure, and reserves, reflecting current service demands, inflationary pressures, and the Council's medium-term financial position.

2.1 The proposed Cemetery Budget for 2026/27

The Cemetery budget for 2026/27 forecasts income of £146,000 and expenditure of £205,481.84, resulting in a net deficit of £59,481.84. While the service continues to operate at a loss, the net position shows a year-on-year improvement.

The 2026/27 deficit represents an improvement of £38,564 compared with 2024/25 and £8,686 compared with 2025/26. This is primarily driven by a significant increase in income, which is £58,858 higher than 2025/26, reflecting improved income performance and/or revised fees and charges.

Expenditure has increased compared with 2025/26 but remains below 2024/25 levels, indicating that overall cost pressures are being managed. Income is forecast to cover approximately 71% of service costs in 2026/27, compared with around 56% in the previous two years.

Overall, the financial position of the Cemetery service is improving, although it remains subsidised. Continued focus on income generation, cost control, and long-term service planning will be required to further reduce the deficit and improve financial sustainability.

2.2 The proposed Victory Hall budget for 2026/27.

Projected income is £41,000, reflecting a significant increase following the completion of the refurbishment in 2026 and the reopening of the kitchen, which has been closed since June 2025. Hire charges will remain unchanged from 2025/26, with a review recommended for 2027/28.

Projected running costs are £53,628, covering payroll, utilities, cleaning, maintenance, and a £5,000 contingency to manage unforeseen costs. This results in a forecast net deficit of £12,628 for the year. The budget recognises that running costs may vary depending on activity levels and utility usage.

2.3 The proposed Allotments budget for 2026/27

Both allotment sites, Limes Farm with 24 plots and Gravel Lane with 30 plots, are fully occupied. Projected income for the year is £2,920, with fees remaining unchanged from 2025/26 and a review recommended for 2027/28.

Projected running costs are also £2,920, resulting in a balanced budget with a net position of zero

2.4 Payroll Cost budget for 2026/27

Payroll cost calculated assuming a 5.00% increase in total cost (3.20% + 1.80%) is £319,316.39. The employees are 8: 5 full-time and 2 part-time, plus 1 apprentice. Any increased amendments will be covered from the general reserves.

3. Income Summary £266,519.84

Key income streams for 2026/27 include:

- Cemetery income: £146,000
- Village Hall and Hub income: £41,000
- Allotments income: £2,920
- Other income: £11,599.84
- A planned contribution of £65,000 from General Reserves to support service delivery and investment during the year

4. Expenditure Summary

4.1 Fixed Costs

Total fixed costs for 2026/27 are £537,681.24, comprising:

- Cemetery operations: £205,481.84
- Allotments: £2,920.00
- Village Hall operating costs: £53,628.22
- Administration costs: £275,651.18

These costs represent essential baseline expenditure required to maintain core services and statutory functions.

4.2 Variable and Discretionary Costs by Council and Committees

Variable costs total £50,650, covering priority projects and community initiatives, including:

- Professional and planning fees
- Grants programme
- Councillor training and allowances
- Open space maintenance, tree management, and festive lighting
- Environmental initiatives (carbon audit, habitat restoration, air quality assessment)
- Community and wellbeing events

These allocations support the Council's strategic objectives and community engagement priorities

4.3 The budget headroom for committees is £3,604.35 and will be allocated to project contingency costs.

5. Overall Budget Position

Total expenditure (fixed and variable) for 2026/27 is £591,935.84.

6. Reserves Position

The proposed budget maintains reserves at prudent and sustainable levels:

- Earmarked Reserves (EMR): £135,000

These EMRs support upcoming capital works, legal provisions, and service improvements

- Estimated General Reserves: £145,000 (including a planned contribution of £65,000)

This level of General Reserves is within the recommended 3–6 months of expenditure, providing resilience against financial risk and unforeseen events. The balance may change due to income received from Council services.

7. Recommendation

7.1 The recommendation from Finance & Governance Committee is that Full Council:

APPROVES the proposed Executive Budget for 2026/27

APPROVES the 2026/27 EMR projects 2026/27 £135,000 and the 2026/27 Revenue Budget £591,935.59 providing an In total budget for 2026/27 of £726,935.59

General Notes:

1. Cemetery: why these costs are included

Local authority cemeteries must be kept safe, secure and in good repair. Managers of operational burial grounds also have to plan ahead by forecasting demand for grave space, managing burial rights and services, and ensuring charges and income levels are agreed by Council. The budget therefore covers both day-to-day running costs and the ongoing maintenance needed to meet legal and health and safety requirements, including duties under the Local Authorities' Cemeteries Order and relevant burial legislation.

Property maintenance (Cost Code 97) covers routine upkeep and repair so that buildings, walls, gates, fences and the wider site remain in good order and do not become unsafe or deteriorate.

Security (Cost Code 98) provides a basic level of protection for the site and its users. This includes CCTV and alarm monitoring, call-outs when required, and arrangements for opening and securing main gates. These measures help deter vandalism, reduce the risk of theft or damage, and support public safety, particularly at quieter times.

General running expenses (Cost Code 100) include essential items that keep staff and the public safe, such as PPE and other health and safety compliance costs. Printing, stationery and postage (Cost Code 92) cover practical administration linked to cemetery services, notices and communications. Mobile service costs (Cost Code 94) support operational working and emergency contact arrangements.

Waste disposal (Cost Code 104) reflects unavoidable costs from grounds work, grave preparation and routine maintenance, including removal of waste materials in a controlled way.

The cemetery compound contains specialist machinery and tools needed to operate and maintain the burial ground. Machinery and equipment maintenance (Cost Code 108) is included because items such as the digger, dumper, mowers and shoring equipment must be serviced, inspected and kept safe to use. Tools, equipment and operational inventories (Cost Code 109) cover the replacement and upkeep of consumables and specialist items required for grave digging, shoring and grounds work. Fuel (Cost Code 118) is required for grass cutting, grounds maintenance and grave digging, with diesel usage linked to the annual workload.

The electric vehicle budget (Cost Code 213) reflects lease and maintenance arrangements and the start of a new lease period. This supports operational travel and equipment movement while transitioning to a lower-emissions fleet where feasible.

Grounds maintenance (Cost Code 139) supports the core principle that the level of maintenance must be sufficient to achieve its purpose. In practice this means keeping the site respectful, accessible and safe through grass cutting, planting and general upkeep, care of trees and shrubs, maintaining paths and access routes, keeping signage and notices in good condition, clearing litter and waste, and carrying out levelling or minor works when needed. Topsoil and turf are included where repairs to ground surfaces are required.

Memorials and grave safety are managed within the legal framework. Families hold the primary responsibility for memorials, but the Council must act where memorials present a hazard to public safety and must follow strict procedures where any clearance or removal is contemplated, especially in consecrated areas where a faculty may be required. Grave inspection (Cost Code 143) is shown as £0.00 for 2026/27 because the programmed memorial inspection work is scheduled and funded in 2025/26 under the approved £10,000 budget.

Grave and facilities maintenance and inspection (Cost Code 144) includes equipment and provisions used to manage unsafe memorials and meet health and safety duties, as well as supporting visitor facilities such as seating and shelter, access routes, parking arrangements, water supplies, bins, signage and noticeboards. The budget also reflects the requirement to consider accessibility and equal treatment, including practical steps to ensure routes and surfaces are usable for people with disabilities.

Benches and plaques (Cost Code 142) are treated as cost of sales because they are linked to memorialisation options provided to residents and are managed as a service item rather than a general operational cost.

Subcontractors for grave digging (Cost Code 148) is included to ensure service continuity and resilience. The Council currently has staff capacity to dig graves, with plans for an apprentice to assist with shoring and the potential for additional trained staff to strengthen in-house capability. Subcontractor provision remains important where workload peaks, staff availability, safety considerations or specialist requirements make it necessary.

2. Allotments: why these costs are included

Allotments are a statutory service area with established expectations around plot size and provision. The commonly accepted full-size plot is 10 poles, approximately 250 square metres. Where there is sufficient demand, residents who are on the electoral roll may request the Council to provide allotments under the relevant legislation. Guidance also indicates a benchmark level of provision based on households, which supports the case for maintaining suitable sites and basic infrastructure.

Budget items in this area are therefore focused on keeping the allotment sites safe, usable and compliant. Notice boards are included to support site communication and management. Works to fences and gates may be required depending on condition, because secure boundaries are needed to reduce damage and discourage fly tipping. Water charges reflect the ongoing cost of providing water supply to plots. Skip hire and waste removal are included because allotment activity generates green waste and disposal needs, and controlled disposal helps keep sites safe and tidy. Health and safety compliance is included to ensure the Council meets its duties as landowner and site manager.

3. Salary budgets: why there is uncertainty in 2026/27

The salary budget sits within a national bargaining framework for local government employees. For 2026/27 the NJC pay claim has been submitted by the unions and negotiations are ongoing, with a

stated aim of implementation from 1 April 2026, but no final agreement is in place yet. This creates uncertainty at budget-setting stage, because the final settlement will determine the actual pay uplift and the associated on-costs.

National funding context also matters. The local government funding settlement outlook described in the notes indicates a year-on-year increase in total resources, but not at a level that would fully fund a higher pay award without creating pressures elsewhere, particularly where councils are already managing significant service demand and cost inflation. The assumption of councils maximising council tax increases also affects how much funding is realistically available for pay and other inflationary pressures.

Apprentice costs for 2026/27 include not only salary but also employer pension contributions where the apprentice meets auto-enrolment eligibility criteria or chooses to opt in. The Council must ensure pension assessments and contributions are made correctly and on time, as apprentices are entitled to pension benefits in the same way as other workers.