



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET

15th FEBRUARY 2018

THE COUNCIL'S 2018/2019 REVENUE BUDGET

REPORT OF THE GROUP DIRECTOR CORPORATE AND FRONTLINE SERVICES IN DISCUSSION WITH THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL, CLLR A MORGAN

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1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT.

- 1.1 This report provides Cabinet with information in respect of the 2018/2019 local government settlement, the outcomes of the general budget consultation exercise and feedback from the pre-scrutiny activity undertaken by the Finance & Performance Scrutiny Committee, to assist it with its deliberations, prior to constructing the revenue budget strategy for the financial year ending 31st March 2019, which it will recommend to Council, for approval.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS.

It is recommended that the Cabinet:

- 2.1 Note that the procedures relating to revenue budget construction, the budget consultation process, and reporting to Council, are laid down in the "Budget and Policy Framework", contained within the Council's Constitution;
- 2.2 Adopt the draft 2018/2019 revenue budget strategy, detailed in the attached Discussion Paper 'Appendix A', as the basis of the revenue budget strategy for the financial year ending the 31st March 2019, that it would wish to recommend to Council, subject to consideration of the results of the general budget consultation exercise and feedback from pre scrutiny by the Finance & Performance Scrutiny Committee.
- 2.3 Agree the draft timetable for setting the 2018/2019 revenue budget, reproduced at Appendix A2.

- 2.4 Agree that the Council continues to support the medium term financial strategy aimed at maximising ongoing efficiency in service delivery, targeted service transformation and other changes that maintain the financial integrity of the Council whilst still aiming as much as possible to protect jobs and key services.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 To allow the Cabinet to review and decide upon budget strategy options for 2018/19 that will ultimately be considered by full Council for approval.

4.0 BACKGROUND.

- 4.1 The revenue budget for the financial year ending the 31st March 2019, must be constructed in accordance with the “Budget and Policy Framework” (contained in the Council’s Constitution), which was agreed by Members in May 2002.
- 4.2 Under these arrangements, it is for the Council’s “respective Chief Officers” to report to Cabinet, and for the Cabinet to then recommend a budget to Council, after having conducted an appropriate budget consultation exercise. I have reproduced the relevant sections of the Constitution at Appendix A1, for Members’ information and guidance.
- 4.3 A draft timetable for agreeing the 2018/2019 revenue budget strategy is attached at Appendix A2.

5.0 THE KEY ELEMENTS OF A BALANCED BUDGET STRATEGY FOR 2018/2019

- 5.1 The Council’s Senior Leadership Team have now met on many occasions to discuss budget issues and have consolidated their thoughts on the impact of the local government settlement, which had been released by the Cabinet Secretary for Local Government and Public Services (Alun Davies AM) on the 20th December 2017 (see Appendix A3). Contained within the discussion paper, reproduced at Appendix A, is what the Senior Leadership Team considers to be the key elements of a balanced revenue budget strategy for 2018/2019.
- 5.2 Using the final settlement, I am able to provide Cabinet Members with details of its potential financial effects on Rhondda Cynon Taf and its Council Tax payers, including an exemplification (Appendix A4) of a high level budget requiring a Council Tax increase of 3.3%.

5.3 At this stage, Cabinet Members are able to take account of consultation feedback (general consultation, Scrutiny and School Budget Forum Feedback) and the views of the Finance & Performance Scrutiny Committee as part of pre-scrutinising the options set out for Cabinet. The results of these exercises are attached at Appendices A5 (i to iii) and A6 respectively.

5.4 Clearly, there are many possible budget permutations open to the Council, but Members' overriding ambition will be to construct a balanced budget package, that is equitable and fair to all by limiting any impact on service provision and where possible, provides for targeting resources to key service areas, whilst, at the same time, avoiding an excessive increase in the Council Tax levied by the County Borough Council.

6.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

6.1 In developing these proposals an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) has been undertaken to ensure that:

- i the Council meets the requirements of the Public Sector Equality Duties; and
- ii due regard has been taken of the likely impact of the decision in terms of equality and discrimination.

7.0 CONSULTATION

7.1 A comprehensive budget consultation exercise has been undertaken in relation to the 2018/19 budget requirements, the details of which are included in appendices attached to this report.

8.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)

8.1 There are no additional financial implications over and above those already set out in the main body of the report

9.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED

9.1 There are no legal implications as a result of the recommendations set out in the report.

10.0 LINKS TO THE CORPORATE AND NATIONAL PRIORITIES AND THE WELL-BEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS ACT.

- 10.1 The establishment of a robust budget strategy is a critical requirement for the Council in order that it is able to deliver its Corporate Plan priorities; improving the provision of essential services; and at the same time 'living within its means'.
- 10.2 The proposals also complement the requirements of the Well Being of Future Generations Act in ensuring that Services have adequate resources to continue their work in shaping provision fit for the future and, in doing so, enable positive contributions to be made toward meeting the seven national wellbeing goals.

11.0 CONCLUSIONS

- 11.1 The Senior Leadership Team holds the collective view that the Council should commit itself to setting its 2018/2019 revenue spending and, as a consequence, the Council Tax levied next year, at a level which balances the desire for fair and equitable service provision, with the need to recognise the impact that excessive tax burdens can have on local households.
- 11.2 A translation of the Senior Leadership Team's recommended strategic approach into a high level budget for 2018/2019 with a Council Tax increase of 3.3% is attached to this report.
- 11.3 Given that the financial resources currently available to the Council are finite and that future local government settlements will continue to present extremely challenging funding issues for local authorities in Wales, the Senior Leadership Team sees the continuation of a robust medium-term financial strategy as being vital, if we are to maintain our core public services.

Other Information

Relevant Scrutiny Committee: Finance & Performance Scrutiny Committee

APPENDIX A

A DISCUSSION PAPER PREPARED BY THE SENIOR LEADERSHIP TEAM IN RESPONSE TO THE 2018/2019 LOCAL GOVERNMENT SETTLEMENT

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1.0 BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The Constitution sets out the procedure, which must be adhered to when setting the Council's annual revenue budget. It is a specific requirement of the Constitution that the Council's Chief Officers first report to the Cabinet, to advise Members on the issues involved (see extract of the Constitution at Appendix 1). Following due consideration of that report, and after having conducted an appropriate budget consultation exercise, it will then be for the Cabinet to determine a strategy and recommend a budget to Council, for final approval. A timetable for this process is attached at Appendix 2.
- 1.2 Prior to determining its preferred budget strategy for the financial year ending the 31st March 2019, the Cabinet must consider:
- The Council's own financial position.
 - The financial and service implications of the Welsh Government's (WG) 2018-2019 local government settlement.
 - The Single Integrated Plan - 'Delivering Change'.
 - The Council's Corporate Plan 2016 - 2020.
 - The level of demand and the statutory basis for delivery of services.
 - The results of the General Budget Strategy consultation exercise.
- 1.3 If Members are to arrive at the best possible outcome for our residents, it will be important that an appropriate weighting is given to each of the six key determinants in paragraph 1.2 above, so that relative resourcing and spending priorities can be properly determined.
- 1.4 Accurate and up-to-date information is readily available in respect of the Council's own financial position, and officers have now analysed the 2018/2019 local government settlement from Rhondda Cynon Taf's perspective.

2.0 THE COUNCIL'S FINANCIAL POSITION

- 2.1 Members have continued to receive regular updates on the financial position and projections for this Council during 2017/18. A key starting point and important consideration is the annual statement of accounts. At the Council meeting on the 20th of September 2017, I presented the Council's audited accounts, which reported General Fund Balances amounting to £10.720M.
- 2.2 Given the continuing financial pressures the Council is working under, it remains my view, that the Council should hold a minimum of £10M as General Fund Balances, (i.e. its working balance). This level is set given the context of the need for continued strong financial management that is felt to be essential to ensure that the Council maintains financial flexibility and stability going forward.
- 2.3 Members will be aware that in addition to General Fund Reserves, the Council also holds a number of earmarked reserves that are kept under continuous review and are assessed each year by the Wales Audit Office. Members will be aware that included in these Reserves is a Medium Term Financial Planning and Service Transformation Reserve that has successfully supported transitional funding as part of the Council's Medium Term Service Planning arrangements. It has achieved this through helping to smooth the delivery of budget savings over a number of years, whilst still allowing an annual balanced budget to be delivered. The starting point for the Medium Term Financial Planning and Service Transformation Reserve as at the 31st March 2017 is £5.484M. As part of our ongoing strategy, we have continued to identify and deliver savings in year which means we have been able to increase the level of transitional funding available and the latest position is that this reserve has now increased to £5.688M (additional in year savings to date of £0.204M).
- 2.4 The Wales Audit Office continues to emphasise that we must remain disciplined at this crucial time, if we are to maintain our long-term goal of driving forward continuous improvement of key services, though this becomes increasingly harder to achieve with such severe financial pressures.
- 2.5 I believe the Wales Audit Office assessment is an accurate one and it is clear that Members continue to take their fiduciary duty extremely seriously as evidenced by the positive reports received from the regulators and the track record of budgetary control across services. The challenge, therefore, is to construct a prudent, equitable and fair revenue budget for the financial year ending the 31st March 2019. This must involve an approach which publicly demonstrates sound financial stewardship; which does not take unnecessary risks; which maximises income generation; continues to deliver year on year efficiency savings and which delivers the services that are needed and we can afford, as well as protecting as many jobs as possible.

3.0 THE 2018/2019 LOCAL GOVERNMENT SETTLEMENT

- 3.1 On the 20th December 2017, the Cabinet Secretary for Local Government and Public Services (Alun Davies AM) announced the Final 2018/2019 Local Government Settlement. The Minister's statement and key data table is attached at Appendix 3.
- 3.2 The "headlines" of the 2018/2019 Settlement are as follows:-
- a. The overall reported increase in Revenue Support Grant (RSG) and Non-Domestic Rates funding for 2018/2019 (of unhypothecated funding) at an all Wales level, is +0.2% (+£8.7M), but this is before new responsibilities are taken into account totalling £13.000M.
 - b. The final reported settlement for Rhondda Cynon Taf, shows an increase of 0.5% which is above the average of 0.2%. Settlement figures across the twenty two local authorities in Wales range from at best +0.9% to at worst -0.5%.
 - c. A 'floor' protection has been included for 2018/19, set at -0.5% and is funded from resources outside of the Settlement.
 - d. The Settlement includes 'transfers in' of (Rhondda Cynon Taf impact in brackets):
 - £35.000M in respect of the Waste Element of the Single Revenue Grant (£2.397M)
 - £26.889M in respect of Welsh Independent Living Grant (£2.492M)
 - £19.000M in respect of Social Care Workforce Grant (£1.548M)
 - £7.415M in respect of Looked After Children (£0.658M)
 - £3.000M in respect of Carers' Respite Care Grant (£0.244M)
 - £0.412M in respect of Social Care for prisoners in the secure estate (nil)
 - e. The settlement includes 'new responsibilities' of £6.000M in respect of Homelessness Prevention and £7.000M in respect of Increasing the Capital Limits for Residential Care to £40,000. The values for this Council are £0.397M and £0.542M respectively.
 - f. There is no reference to indicative 2019/20 settlement levels, although the provisional settlement made reference to -1.5% at an all Wales level.
 - g. A number of specific grants are still not available and where provided, some have been reduced (for example the Education Improvement Grant (EIG) all Wales reduction is £15M).

- h. The Council's General Capital Funding allocation is decreased slightly by 0.16% (£0.018M) to £11.214M. It is stated that capital settlements are to remain at this level for 2018/19 and the following two years.

4.0 RECENT BASE BUDGET UPDATES

4.1 Budget assumptions used in compiling the "Base Budget" for the Council are constantly being reviewed and updated. In recent weeks a number of adjustments have been identified that will impact on the estimated budget requirement for 2018/2019. These are:

- a. *Sickness Management* – Additional resources totalling £0.130M are being proposed to support the Council's continued focus on reducing levels of sickness by working with services to target and support areas where there are high levels of sickness and, as part of this work, further develop the competence of managers in helping to secure on-going improvement in the levels of attendance.
- b. *Pay Award Offer* – Previous modelling was based on a 1% pay award uplift across all staff categories plus continuing the Council's commitment to the Living Wage Foundation minimum rate. On the 5th of December 2017 the National Employers for Local Government Services made a 2 year pay offer covering 2018/19 and 2019/20. For both years, the offer includes increases above 2% at lower grades to close pay differentials linked to implementation of the National Living Wage and at remaining grades a 2% pay award is proposed. The first year of the pay offer would see the national pay bill increase by 2.707% with the second year equating to 2.802% (a total increase over the two year period totalling 5.584%).

The budgetary impact of the proposed pay award, if agreed, represents an additional cost of £1.800M for 2018/19.

- c. *Specific Inflationary Uplifts* – Specific updates in assumptions for inflation. Based on latest procurement intelligence, energy costs (tariffs) are not anticipated to rise as initially modelled. However, food costs are expected to rise more than modelled. The net impact of these movements is a reduction to the budget requirement of £0.146M.
- d. *Council Tax Support for Care Leavers* – Cabinet on the 19th of December 2017 agreed to award 100% Discretionary Council Tax Relief to care leavers aged 18-25 from the 1st April 2018. The cost of providing this discount is estimated to be £0.010M.
- e. *Rhondda Fach Investment & Reconfiguration* – Cabinet on the 21st November 2017 agreed to extensive remodelling of the centre which included closure of the swimming pool, delivering a base saving of £0.100M per annum.

f. *Other* - a number of other budget adjustments have been reflected in the updated position as part of further work on refining base budget requirements for 2018/19. Examples of updates included are additional costs linked to contractual arrangements such as waste services, additional legal costs linked to Special Education Needs and additional costs across a number of our external care contracts, offset by reductions in Fire Service levy, contributions to the Central South Education Service and confirmation of continued external funding for Work choice payments (protected factory places) The overall net increase in costs added to the base requirements at Final Settlement stage totals £0.208M.

4.2 In summary, the measures listed above in 4.1 are shown in Table 1 below:

Table 1: Recent Base Budget Updates Impacting on the 2018/19 Base

	£M
Sickness Team	0.130
Pay Award Offer	1.800
Specific Inflation Update	-0.146
Council Tax Support for Care Leavers	0.010
Rhondda Fach Investment & Reconfiguration	-0.100
Other	0.208
TOTAL	1.902

5.0 THE FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE 2018/2019 SETTLEMENT FOR RHONDDA CYNON TAF

5.1 The final settlement indicates that our 2018/2019 RSG and NDR funding will total £364.176M.

5.2 In anticipation of the 2018/2019 local government settlement, the Council's service managers have constructed base budget requirements for next financial year. Those initial calculations provided for:-

- Estimated national wage awards, pension costs and National Insurance Contribution levels;
- Non-pay (i.e. goods and services) inflation, including energy and fuel;
- Corporate financing requirements and levies; and
- Full year effects of additional burdens imposed on the Council.

5.3 The position I reported to Council (18th October 2017) at the Provisional Settlement stage indicated a budget gap of £3.834M. This position assumed a modelled 3.0% Council Tax increase, savings already secured early in 2017/18 (£1.856M) and a commitment to deliver £6M of efficiency savings in 2018/19. Taking account now of the recent base budget updates summarised in Table 1 and the impact of the Final Settlement and Tax Base update (together providing additional net resources of £1.961M) means that the budget gap has now decreased marginally to **£3.775M** (a net decrease of £0.059M).

6.0 DEVELOPING AN EQUITABLE, DELIVERABLE AND BALANCED BUDGET FOR 2018/2019

6.1 It will not be easy for us to develop an equitable and deliverable revenue budget strategy given the modest 0.5% increase in funding from the Welsh Government and the significant pressure upon many of our services together with a limited ability to increase Council Tax income, and a low tax base. Within these parameters, we will therefore need to take appropriate decisions to ensure that next year's budget is equitable for all, does not compromise our financial stability, and if at all possible protects as many key services and safeguards as many jobs as we can.

6.2 I touched upon the Council's overall financial position in Section 2 of the report. In my view, it is vital that we continue with the strategy adopted thus far that takes account of the importance of sound financial management, including the level of General Fund balances and appropriate use of the "Medium Term Financial Planning and Service Transformation Reserve" as transitional funding, whilst targeting any available resources toward our high priority, customer-focused public services.

6.3 Every year, there are certain corporate financial provisions that must be "top sliced" locally, before service budgets can be allocated. Next year will be no different. There will be a requirement for:

- a) A provision to meet levies from External Bodies;
- b) A provision for Capital Charges;
- c) A provision for all other "Miscellaneous Finance" items (Audit Fees, Insurance Costs, Bank Charges, etc.) which are non-specific to any particular Service Group; and
- d) Resources to fund the Council Tax Reduction Scheme.

6.4 After setting aside appropriate sums for corporate financial requirements, Members can then fully assess the issues and opportunities for the budget as a whole.

Council Tax Levels

- 6.5 This Council has always acted reasonably when setting its Council Tax, balancing the impact upon services and the ability of the public to pay acknowledging that those eligible, will receive support through the Welsh Government's Council Tax Reduction Scheme (CTRS). The proposal is to increase Council Tax in 2018/19 by 3.30%, that is, above the 3.00% modelled in the initial budget gap calculations. Increasing the level by 0.30% will lower the budget gap by £0.239M for 2018/19, hence the updated gap becomes **£3.536M**.
- 6.6 Members will be aware that the costs of the CTRS associated with increases in Council Tax levels and changes in caseload impact on the net income generated through any increase in Council Tax. A 1% increase in Council Tax will generate an additional income for the Council of £1.030M (at the 2018/19 tax base level), but will also cost £0.235M in additional CTRS requirements. It therefore follows that a 1% increase generates a net additional income of £0.795M, or stated another way, almost one quarter (23%) of any Council Tax increase is lost to support the increased costs associated with the Welsh Government's CTRS.
- 6.7 Whilst the focus for this report is predominantly on 2018/19 and an initial net "funding gap" of almost £10M before any savings and efficiencies are applied, this gap is projected to rise significantly over the three years to 2020/21 if our base budget is not reduced. In relation to next financial year initially, it is proposed that this exercise is dealt with in two parts – firstly, setting the schools budget, and secondly assessing the options for filling any remaining gap for 2018/2019.

Schools Budget (ISB)

- 6.8 Members have always viewed our schools as being a key priority and have ensured that they have been treated favourably in comparison with other council services. Whilst there continues to be no direction by Welsh Government for 2018/19 to protect Schools, Members are still minded to prioritise funding in this area and as part of the initial budget modelling assumptions had committed to provide a £1M cash uplift for schools. Given the improved Final Settlement and the priority to support schools, it is now proposed that a £2M cash uplift is provided in 2018/19. In cash terms, this represents a 1.4% increase to the school's budget, which is set in the context of the Council as a whole receiving an increase of 0.5% from Welsh Government. The result of providing this increase to schools is that the overall schools budget for next year will increase from £146.950M to £148.950M. This will see our schools treated more favourably than other Council services but like other services, it is acknowledged that they will have to fund additional costs next year associated with increased employee costs, and the costs of the apprenticeship levy which schools have been protected from to date. It is noted that some efficiency planning will therefore be required at a school level. This proposal would see the overall school budget

requirement reducing by £0.433M, compared with 'total need' previously modelled, leaving a remaining overall budget gap for the Council of **£3.103M**.

Dealing With The Remaining Revenue Budget Gap

- 6.9 This Council has taken a proactive approach to dealing with the austerity cuts it has faced in recent years. This approach I believe is still the right one and we will adopt a similar strategy for 2018/19.
- 6.10 Following careful consideration, the following approach is recommended:
- a. *Efficiencies* – The Council has successfully delivered over £80m in efficiency savings over the last 10 years or so. Whilst the generation of efficiency savings becomes increasingly difficult over time, new technology, collaboration and new ways of working are examples of where such gains can still be delivered. As in previous years, services have been tasked with identifying 'general' base budget efficiency savings. In total, efficiency savings amounting to £6.000M were targeted for 2018/19 and confirmed at Provisional Settlement stage. Notwithstanding this target level, additional efficiency savings have now been identified bringing the efficiency total to £7.050M and as such a further £1.050M can be set against the budget gap. This additional efficiency includes additional energy savings in street lighting, reductions in equipment / stationary budgets and increased income generation in services such as Leisure and the Rhondda Heritage Park.
 - b. *Fees & Charges* - A report on the proposed level of Fees & Charges for 2018/19 will be presented to Cabinet shortly. Subject to Cabinet approval, this proposes a standard increase of 2.95%, with a number of specific exceptions including no increases for Car Park charges and changes to fee levels for Bereavement Services, Meals on Wheels, school meals and for adult users of the Pontypridd Lido. The budgetary impact of this recommendation, if agreed, totals £0.253M.
 - c. *Council Tax Reduction Scheme (CTRS)* – Members will be aware through the quarterly performance reports this year that the costs associated with the CTRS have been consistently below budget. As at Quarter 2 (reported 21st November 2017), the projected underspend in this area was £0.485M. Further work on caseloads and demand has now been undertaken as part of the base budget update work and the proposal is to reduce the base budget in 2018/19 by £0.500M. It should be noted that whilst this takes the budget to £23.782M, this is still in excess of the Welsh Government funding for this area which for 2018/19 totals £21.772M.

d. *Meals on Wheels* – A report on operational changes planned to improve the efficiency of the Community Meals Service was presented to Cabinet on the 25th January 2018. Agreement was given to maintaining the existing seven days a week service but remodelling delivery arrangements through:

- Continuing to deliver freshly cooked meals on weekdays
- Delivering frozen meals on the weekend rather than blast chilled meals
- Reducing the number of production kitchens from three to one
- Retaining the open access service to clients
- Transferring the management of St Mair's and Mountain Ash Day Centres to Community & Children's Services

The Budgetary impact of these changes will deliver £0.258M of savings in 2018/19.

e. *Fixed Penalty Notices* - A report on the increase in fine levels for Fixed Penalty Notices and the widening of the scope to additional areas was presented to Cabinet on the 25th January 2018. The budgetary impact of these changes will deliver £0.020M of savings in 2018/19.

f. *Medium Term Financial Planning and Service Transformation Reserve (Transitional Funding)* – Whilst efficiency savings and cost reduction measures are already in place for 2018/19, it is recognised that further in year savings are necessary to close future year budget gaps. The notion of an annual budget setting process no longer exists and we continue to apply a proactive and ongoing approach to identifying and implementing savings. In doing so, we are able to replenish transitional funding in year and secure base budget savings in the following year. As previously indicated, we have a "Medium Term Financial Planning and Service Transformation Reserve" that provides the tool, albeit short term and one off in nature, for such an approach and this equates currently to £5.688M. To address the current budget deficit, it is proposed that an allocation of £1.022M is made from this reserve for 2018/19. This would facilitate a balanced budget for 2018/19 and would leave £4.666M in the reserve (subject to the year end assessment of reserves post March 31st 2018). Use of £1.022M of one off funding is less than the level used for 2017/18. I am confident that processes are now well embedded to ensure that savings are achieved in year and this reserve continues to be replenished.

6. 11 In summary, Table 3 lists the proposals recommended to close the remaining budget gap for 2018/19, that will deliver a balanced budget for next year:

Table 3 : Budget Strategy Proposals 2018/19

	£M	£M
Budget Gap		3.103
Strategy Proposals		
Additional Efficiency (over and above the £6M)	-1.050	
Fees & Charges	-0.253	
Council Tax Reduction Scheme	-0.500	
Meals on Wheels Changes	-0.258	
Fixed Penalty Notices	-0.020	
		-2.081
Remaining Budget Gap		1.022
Use of 'One Off' Funding		
Use of the Medium Term Financial Planning & Service Transformation Reserve		-1.022
Total		0.000

Service Priorities

- 6.12 Even within this period of significantly reducing resources and hence financial pressure on all services, this Council remains committed as far as it possibly can to continue to deliver its key services, stronger communities and social justice. The Council's Corporate Plan 2016-2020 sets out that our key purpose is to provide a County Borough that has high aspirations, is confident and promotes opportunity for all.
- 6.13 However, we must deliver our objectives within the parameters of next year's local government settlement. For next year and into the medium term any available resources should be targeted at key service areas. Part of our General Budget Consultation exercise (explained further in Section 8) has been to test the appropriateness of our key strategic priorities around the themes of:
- *Economy* – building a strong economy;
 - *People* – promoting independence and positive lives for everyone; and
 - *Place* – creating neighbourhoods where people are proud to live and work.

6.14 In addition to our revenue base budget requirements, opportunities also continue to be taken to deliver investment in key strategic areas through one off funding made available via a risk based review of earmarked reserves and through identification of in year savings opportunities. The latest of these investment tranches in November 2017 provided an additional £7M of funding to support various schemes including major infrastructure requirements, 3G pitches, Community Hubs and Leisure Centre changing rooms. Cabinet at its meeting on the 25th January 2018 agreed in principle to a strategic capital investment programme of over £300M, for the next five years, over and above the Council's existing capital projects and spending plans. In support of this strategy, we will continue to review opportunities for further investment during 2018/19 and a report setting out the updated capital programme for 2018/19 will be reported for Members consideration shortly.

7.0 2018/2019 SERVICE GROUP BUDGETS

7.1 The Council adopts a comprehensive budget challenge process involving senior managers from each Service Group, with a subsequent detailed review and assessment being conducted by the Senior Leadership Team, to ensure consistency and fairness across all service areas.

7.2 The 2017/2018 revenue budget and the regular performance monitoring reports are available to the Cabinet, to act as a benchmark to evaluate 2017/2018 service delivery options, and savings proposals. It is, of course, important to appreciate that the current year's figures are for information purposes only and are not meant to represent a base service requirement, or target. Indeed, budget provisions for next year could be more, or less, than the 2017/2018 figures, depending upon Members' decisions and spending priorities, and on the impact of the 2018/2019 local government settlement.

7.3 All of our services have recently completed their annual self assessment exercise to support the preparation of delivery plans that will set out key actions for improvement and how progress will be measured. Funding will be a key consideration for these plans and the Senior Leadership Team's budget proposals are intended to underpin these improvements. This will allow the budget to be built "bottom up", on the basis of properly identified service need, within the framework provided by the Single Integrated Plan and our own Corporate Plan.

7.4 Members will, of course, be keen to demonstrate that the Council is properly discharging all its statutory obligations, but with funding at a premium, will also wish to ensure that our services are being delivered in the most economic, efficient, and effective manner. The basic principle which should, therefore, underpin the construction of the 2018/2019 budget, is that Members will look to target adequate funding towards the delivery of our key services whilst, at the same time, ensuring that the resultant Council Tax levied next year is reasonable and can be justified to our residents. Attached at Appendix 4 is an outline budget proposal, including efficiency requirements

and service provision amendments. This is based on a Council Tax increase of 3.3%.

8.0 THE 2018/2019 GENERAL BUDGET STRATEGY CONSULTATION PROCESS

- 8.1 As in previous years, the Council has been keen to consult with the public and other interested stakeholders on its general budget strategy and how services are delivered.
- 8.2 The general budget consultation ran from the 6th of November 2017 to the 18th of December 2017 and over 1500 people were involved in the process (compared to 900 last year). The results of the consultation are attached at Appendix 5i. The consultation methods used this year included:
- An online Budget Simulator
 - A number of Town Centre, Leisure Centre and Library events
 - Member led Engagement Events
 - Promotion through Social media, including a Youtube video
 - Questions/polls on social media
 - A Young Person's Budget Engagement Event and school event
 - Older Persons Advisory Group Meeting
 - Promotion with the Citizen's Panel.
- 8.3 The Council again engaged with relevant stakeholders through the use of an online Budget Simulator. The Budget Simulator outlined a range of services that the Council provides and their associated budgets and then asked people to make £3.8M of savings by adjusting the budget for each service, as well as the level of council tax.
- 8.4 The general budget consultation also incorporated the requirements to consult on discretions available locally for the Council Tax Reduction Scheme (which was used to inform the Council's decision on its scheme for 2018/19 that was considered by Council on the 17th January 2018).
- 8.5 In addition, specific consultation activity was undertaken with the Finance & Performance Scrutiny Committee and the School Budget Forum and minutes of these meetings are attached at Appendices 5ii and 5iii respectively.
- 8.6 Again this year, the draft strategy was subject to pre scrutiny so that non executive members were able to examine proposals and help shape their development before Cabinet considered the detail. The Finance and Performance Scrutiny Committee undertook pre scrutiny of the Budget Strategy proposals and the general consultation feedback report on the 29th January 2018. Attached at Appendix 6 are the minutes (currently draft) from this meeting.

9.0 CONCLUSIONS

- 9.1 On the 20th December 2017, the Cabinet Secretary for Local Government and Public Services (Alun Davies AM) announced the Final 2018/2019 Local Government Settlement which showed this Council's increase in resources was set at 0.5%.
- 9.2 Whilst the Council's overall financial position remains sound, its level of General Fund Balances are not excessive. The Council must, therefore, retain its focus on holding a minimum level of General Fund Balances of £10M, in order to mitigate any risk of future budget instability. There is though the opportunity to pragmatically use the Medium Term Financial Planning and Service Transformation Reserve as transitional funding without compromising the Council's financial stability, or reducing our General Fund Balances below £10M.
- 9.3 As detailed in the report, the use of such transitional funding would produce a balanced budget for 2018/2019, and the reliance on this one off funding continues to reduce in accordance with medium term financial planning requirements.
- 9.4 The Council to date has been able to deliver year on year balanced budgets alongside an investment programme supporting key priorities. The challenge remains though for positive and proactive management from the Senior Leadership Team and clear direction from Cabinet to produce a financially sustainable budget into the medium term in what continues to be an extremely challenging financial climate.

Appendix 1

BUDGET AND POLICY FRAMEWORK PROCEDURE RULES

1. The Framework for Executive Decisions

The Council will be responsible for the adoption of its policy framework and budget as set out in article 4. The policy framework and budget adopted by the Council will be based on that proposed by the Executive. Once a budget or a policy framework is in place, it will be the responsibility of the Executive to implement it.

2. Process for Developing the Framework

(a) The Cabinet, following detailed reports from respective Chief Officers, (following appropriate consultation with stakeholders) will present to Council, proposed plans, policies and the associated annual budgets. This will be done allowing adequate time for Council to deal with the matter and, if needed, refer the matter back to the Executive for further consideration.

(b) The Council will consider the proposals of the Cabinet and may adopt them, amend them, refer them back to the Cabinet for further consideration, or substitute its own proposals in their place. In considering the matter, the Council shall have before it the Executive's proposals and any related report from the Finance and Performance Scrutiny Committee.

Any amendments to the proposals of the Cabinet to be proposed by members at Council may not be considered by Council unless notice of the proposed amendment has been given to the proper officer in writing and signed by the proposer and seconder not later than 5:00pm at least 8 calendar days (not including the date of the meeting) before the date of the Council meeting.

(c) Any proposed amendment by a Member of the Council to the proposals of the Cabinet and made in accordance with paragraph 2 (b) above shall only be accepted and submitted to full Council for consideration if in the opinion of the Proper Officer (in consultation with advice sought from the s151 Officer) it is deemed to be legal and within the competence of the Council.

(d) The Council's decision will be publicised and a copy shall be given to the Leader. The notice of decision shall be dated and shall state either that the decision shall be effective immediately (if the Council accepts the Cabinet's proposals without amendment) or (if the Cabinet's proposals are not accepted without amendment), that the Council's decision will become effective on the expiry of 5 working days after the publication of the notice of decision, unless the Leader objects to it in that period.

(e) If the Leader objects to the decision of the Council, he/she shall give written notice to the Chief Executive to that effect, prior to the date upon which the decision is to be effective. The written notification must state the reasons for the objection. Where such notification is received, the Chief Executive shall convene

Part 4

a further meeting of the Council to reconsider its decision and the decision shall not be effective pending that meeting.

(f) The Council meeting must take place within 21 working days of the receipt of the Leader's written objection. At that Council meeting, the decision of the Council shall be reconsidered in the light of the objection, which shall be available in writing for the Council.

(g) The Council shall, at that meeting, make its final decision on the matter on the basis of a simple majority. The decision shall be made public in accordance with Article 4 and shall be implemented immediately.

(h) All policy and budget reports presented to Council for decision shall subsequently be presented to the next calendar Finance and Performance Scrutiny Committee.

3. Decisions Outside the Budget or Policy Framework

(a) Subject to the provisions of the Financial Procedure Rules in Part 4 of the constitution relating to virement, (see (c) below), the Cabinet, Committee of the Cabinet, individual Members of the Cabinet, and any Officers, or joint arrangements discharging executive functions, may only take decisions which are in line with the budget and policy framework. If any of these bodies or persons wishes to make a decision which is contrary to the policy framework, or contrary to the budget approved by full Council, then that decision may only be taken by the Council, subject to the urgent decisions process.

(b) If the Cabinet, Committee of the Cabinet, individual Members of the Cabinet, and any Officers, or joint arrangements discharging executive functions, want to make such a decision, they shall take advice from the Monitoring Officer and/or the Chief Finance Officer as to whether the decision they want to make would be contrary to the policy framework, or the budget. If the advice of either of those Officers is that the decision would not be in line with the existing budget and policy framework, then the decision must be referred by that body or person to the Council for decision, unless the decision is a matter of urgency, in which case the provisions of the urgent decisions outside the budget and policy framework process shall apply.

(c) **Virement Rules for Revenue Expenditure.** The relevant extracts from the Finance Procedure Rules are set out below:-

Virements within Divisions (up to £25k)

The Divisional Director is authorised to action virements up to a value of £25k within his/her Division, all changes will be reported to the Corporate and Frontline Services Group Director. There will be no limit to the number of virements in any year, however there should be no manipulation used to circumvent the process for higher limit virements i.e. artificially splitting amounts to remain below £25k.

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Virements within Groups (up to £100k)

Group Directors are authorised, in consultation with the Corporate and Frontline Services Group Director to approve virements up to value of £100k within their respective service groups.

Virements between Groups (up to £100k)

Virements between groups up to a level of £100k must be approved by the respective Group Directors plus the Corporate and Frontline Services Group Director.

Virements above £100k and up to £500k

Virements above £100k, and up to £500k, both within groups and between groups must be approved by the Executive.

Virements above £500k

All virements above £500k must be approved by Council.

Timing of Virements

Virements should be actioned prior to overspending occurring on a particular budget head. This is considered good accounting practice and demonstrates good budget management.

4. Urgent Decisions Outside the Budget or Policy Framework

(a) The Cabinet, Committee of the Cabinet, an individual Member of the Cabinet, or Officers, or joint arrangements discharging Cabinet functions, may take a decision which is contrary to the Council's policy framework or contrary to or not wholly in accordance with the budget approved by full Council, if the decision is a matter of urgency. However, the decision may only be taken:

- (i) if it is not practical to convene a quorate meeting of the full Council; and
- (ii) if the Chair of the Finance and Performance Scrutiny Committee agrees that the decision is a matter of urgency.

The reasons why it is not practical to convene a quorate meeting of full Council and the Chair of the Finance and Performance Scrutiny Committees' consent to the decision being taken as a matter of urgency must be noted on the record of the decision. In the absence of the Chair of the Finance and Performance Scrutiny Committee, the consent of the Chair of the Council and, in his/her absence, the consent of the Vice Chair, will be sufficient.

(b) Following the decision, the decision taker will provide a full report to the next available Council meeting explaining the decision, the reasons for it and why the decision was treated as a matter of urgency.

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(c) Urgent decisions taken in accordance with this paragraph shall not be the subject of the Call-in provisions set out in paragraph 5 below.

5. Call-In of Decisions Outside the Budget or Policy Framework

(a) Where the Overview and Scrutiny Committee is of the opinion that a decision is, or if made would be, contrary to the policy framework, or contrary to the Council's budget, then it shall seek advice from the Monitoring Officer and/or Chief Finance Officer.

(b) In respect of functions which are the responsibility of the Cabinet, the Monitoring Officer's report and/or Chief Finance Officer's report shall be to the Cabinet with a copy to every Member of the Council. Regardless of whether the decision is delegated or not, the Cabinet must meet to decide what action to take in respect of the Monitoring Officer's report and/or the Chief Finance Officer's report, and to prepare a report to Council in the event that the Monitoring Officer or the Chief Finance Officer conclude that the decision was a departure, and to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee if the Monitoring Officer or the Chief Finance Officer conclude that the decision was not a departure.

(c) If the decision has yet to be made, or has been made but not yet implemented, and the advice from the Monitoring Officer and/or the Chief Finance Officer is that the decision is, or would be, contrary to the policy framework, or contrary to or not wholly in accordance with the budget, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee may refer the matter to Council. In such cases, no further action will be taken in respect of the decision or its implementation until the Council has met and considered the matter. The Council shall meet within 21 working days of the request by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. At the meeting it will receive a report of the decision or proposals and the advice of the Monitoring Officer and/or the Chief Finance Officer. The Council may either:

(i) endorse a decision or proposal of the Executive or Officer (under a Key Officer Delegated Decision) decision taker as falling within the existing budget and policy framework. In this case, no further action is required, save that the decision of the Council be minuted and distributed to all Members in the normal way;

Or

(ii) amend the Council's budget or policy concerned, to encompass the decision or proposal of the body or individual responsible for that executive function and agree to the decision with immediate effect. In this case, no further action is required, save that the decision of the Council be minuted and distributed to all Members in the normal way;

Part 4

Or

(iii) where the Council accepts that the decision or proposal is contrary to the policy framework or contrary to or not wholly in accordance with the budget, and does not amend the existing framework to accommodate it, require the Cabinet to reconsider the matter in accordance with the advice of either the Monitoring Officer/Chief Finance Officer.

Part 4 Rules of Procedure 02/01/2018 40

APPENDIX 2

2018/2019 BUDGET AND COUNCIL TAX SETTING TIMETABLE

18th December 2017

Consultation – End of General Budget Consultation (including Council Tax Reduction Scheme and Corporate Plan elements)

20th December 2017

Final Local Government Settlement - Receipt of final settlement figures

29th January 2018

Pre Scrutiny – Draft 'Chief Officer' Budget Strategy proposals to be considered by non executive members, through Finance & Performance Scrutiny Committee prior to consideration by Cabinet.

15th February, 2018

Cabinet Meeting – Consideration of draft 'Senior Leadership Team' Budget Strategy proposals to allow Cabinet to formulate their budget proposals, taking into account the general budget consultation feedback, and the 'pre scrutiny' views from Finance & Performance Scrutiny Committee.

Cabinet Decision required:

Cabinet budget proposals for recommendation to Council to be determined

28th February 2018

Council Meeting – Cabinet to submit proposals to the Council for the 2018/2019 Budget Strategy and 2018/19 Council Tax levels

Council Decision required:

Approve the 2018/2019 Revenue Budget.

Approve the 2018/2019 Council Tax.



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

WRITTEN STATEMENT BY THE WELSH GOVERNMENT

Title **Final Local Government Settlement 2018-19**

Date **20 December 2017**

By **Alun Davies AM**
Cabinet Secretary for Local Government and Public Services

Following the announcement yesterday of the Welsh Government's Final Budget proposals for next year, I am today publishing details of the Final Local Government Settlement for 2018-19 setting out the allocations of core revenue funding for each of the 22 county and county borough councils.

In preparing the final settlement, I have given careful consideration to the responses I received to the consultation on the provisional settlement which closed on 21 November. This announcement provides councils with a robust basis for their financial planning for the coming financial year.

Compared with the provisional settlement, next year's final settlement for 2018-19 will include an additional £20 million as a result of the Welsh Government's final budget allocations. Also the final settlement includes a further £7 million to support the increase to the capital limit in charging for residential care to £40,000 commencing from April 2018. The changes mean the final settlement represents a slight cash increase overall, equivalent to an increase of 0.2% after adjusting for transfers.

The settlement also provides an additional £1.3 million of funding to local authorities, for them to use their discretionary powers to provide targeted relief to support local businesses which would benefit most from additional assistance.

The additional funding means that I am also able to revise the floor arrangements set out in the provisional announcement such that no authority now faces a reduction of more than 0.5% compared with the current year, on a like for like basis.

Yesterday's Final Budget announcement also included a further £20 million for local government in 2019-20.

This is a realistic settlement that continues to protect local government from significant cuts against a backdrop of reducing budgets from the UK Government.

While the unhypothecated Settlement is the largest single source of funding available to authorities, it is not the only one. In setting their budgets and council tax levels for next year, I expect every authority to take account of all the available funding streams and to consider how to secure best value for Welsh taxpayers through effective and efficient service provision. We offer considerable flexibility to authorities to exercise autonomy and responsibility in managing their finances.

Revenue grants

Alongside the settlement, I am publishing the latest information on Welsh Government grant schemes planned for 2018-19. This will assist local authorities in preparing their budgets for next year.

Individual authority allocations

Table 1 sets out the final distribution of Aggregate External Finance (comprising revenue support grant and redistributed non-domestic rates) between the 22 councils for 2018-19.

Capital settlement

Capital funding for 2018-19 amounts to £485 million. Within this, General Capital Funding for 2018-19 and the following two years will remain unchanged at £143 million. This provides clarity and certainty on future funding for authorities' own capital spending priorities.

The motion for the National Assembly for Wales to approve the Local Government Finance Report for 2018-19 is scheduled for debate on 16 January 2018.

This statement is being issued during recess in order to keep members informed. Should members wish me to make a further statement or to answer questions on this when the Assembly returns I would be happy to do so.

[523 words]

Table 1: 2018-19 final settlement – comparison of the 2017-18 AEF including top-up funding (adjusted for transfers and tax-base changes) and the 2018-19 final AEF and top-up funding

	<i>£000s</i>							
Unitary authority	2017-18 adjusted AEF plus top-up funding ¹	Of which top-up funding	2018-19 final AEF	2018-19 top-up funding	2018-19 final AEF plus top-up funding ²	% change on adjusted 2017-18 AEF plus top-up funding	Rank	Council Tax Reduction Schemes (distributed within AEF)
Isle of Anglesey	95,191	0	95,812	0	95,812	0.7%	2	5,187
Gwynedd	174,093	0	175,127	0	175,127	0.6%	4	8,926
Conwy	154,386	0	153,576	39	153,615	-0.5%	20	8,976
Denbighshire	143,395	0	143,119	0	143,119	-0.2%	15	9,172
Flintshire	189,565	0	189,156	0	189,156	-0.2%	16	9,761
Wrexham	174,009	0	174,636	0	174,636	0.4%	8	9,672
Powys	174,706	1,237	174,026	0	174,026	-0.4%	19	8,043
Ceredigion	100,819	0	101,251	0	101,251	0.4%	6	4,881
Pembrokeshire	161,314	0	161,774	0	161,774	0.3%	9	7,077
Carmarthenshire	258,819	0	259,440	0	259,440	0.2%	11	14,249
Swansea	317,122	0	319,087	0	319,087	0.6%	3	19,180
Neath Port Talbot	211,838	0	212,341	0	212,341	0.2%	12	16,300
Bridgend	191,467	0	191,582	0	191,582	0.1%	13	12,907
The Vale Of Glamorgan	152,114	0	152,480	0	152,480	0.2%	10	9,063
Rhondda Cynon Taf	362,319	0	364,176	0	364,176	0.5%	5	21,772
Merthyr Tydfil	90,635	391	90,305	0	90,305	-0.4%	17	5,643
Caerphilly	268,248	0	267,240	0	267,240	-0.4%	18	13,302
Blaenau Gwent	110,905	0	109,633	717	110,351	-0.5%	20	8,261
Torfaen	131,652	0	131,543	0	131,543	-0.1%	14	7,996
Monmouthshire	93,737	0	93,218	51	93,268	-0.5%	20	5,649
Newport	211,954	0	212,790	0	212,790	0.4%	7	10,362
Cardiff	437,048	0	440,947	0	440,947	0.9%	1	27,619
All Unitary Authorities	4,205,337	1,628	4,213,260	807	4,214,067	0.2%		244,000

1. 2017-18 AEF adjusted for latest tax base, transfers of £91.7m into the Settlement and inclusive of £1.6m of top-up funding provided in 2017-18.

2. 2018-19 Final AEF including £807 thousand top-up funding.

APPENDIX 4

AVAILABLE REVENUE RESOURCES 2018/19 AND PROPOSED USAGE

	£'000
Total resources available in 2018/2019	471,600
LESS: Total resources available in 2017/2018	458,940
<u>INCREASE</u> in resources available in 2018/2019	12,660

	£'000
Allocation of Resources	
Delegated Schools Budget	2,000
Education & Lifelong Learning Services (Other)	952
Community & Children's Services	6,822
Corporate and Front line Services and Chief Executive's Division	3,018
Authority Wide Requirements	(132)
	12,660

PROPOSED REVENUE BUDGET 2018/19

Education & Lifelong Learning Services

Delegated Schools Budgets

	£'000
Net Revenue Budget 2017/18	146,950
Increase	2,000
Proposed Net Revenue Budget 2018/19	148,950

Non Delegated Budgets

	£'000
Net Revenue Budget 2017/18	30,905
Base and Inflationary Pressures	2,293
General Efficiencies	(811)
Other Cost Reduction Measures	(530)
Proposed Net Revenue Budget 2018/19	31,857

Total Net Revenue Budget 2018/19	180,807

Community & Children's Services

	£'000
Net Revenue Budget 2017/18	138,108
Base and Inflationary Pressures	11,256
General Efficiencies	(2,565)
Other Cost Reduction Measures	(1,869)
Proposed Net Revenue Budget 2018/19	144,930

Corporate and Front Line Services & Chief Executive's Division

	£'000
Net Revenue Budget 2017/18	72,995
Base and Inflationary Pressures	6,506
General Efficiencies	(2,624)
Other Cost Reduction Measures	(864)
Proposed Net Revenue Budget 2018/19	76,013

Authority Wide

	£'000
Net Revenue Budget 2017/18	69,982
Increase / Decrease	(132)
Proposed Net Revenue Budget 2018/19	69,850

Use of Reserves (Transition Funding)	1,022
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Appendix 5i



RCT Budget Consultation

2018/19 Budget Strategy



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- This report presents the findings of the General Budget Strategy Consultation for 2018/19. The report is a summary of the main points made during the process and separately all comments and suggestions will be passed to the relevant service managers.
- The Council faces a budget gap of approximately £3.8M for 2018/19. The consultation is an essential part of the budget setting process and assists the Cabinet with its deliberations.
- The Council's budget consultation ran from 6th November to the 18th December 2017.

The methods of consultation included;

- An online Budget Simulator
 - A number of Town Centre, Leisure Centre and Library events
 - Member led Engagement Events
 - Promotion through Social media, including a Youtube video
 - Questions/polls on social media
 - A Young Person's Budget Engagement Event and school event
 - Older Persons Advisory Group Meeting
 - Promotion with the Citizen's Panel.
- Over 1500 people were engaged in the budget setting process.
 - The overall average budget was reduced by the 167 respondents who attempted to balance the budget using the online budget simulator. The average income increased by £1,792,976 and the average revised expenditure put forward showed a decrease of £1,242,451. The increase in total income from the simulator, is made up of a council tax increase of £932,048 and the use of transitional funding of £860,928.
 - The **top 10 services** that received the largest % decrease in average budget were;

Service Item	Average Change %
Waste (Black bags) (Total Budget £5,567,000)	-1.02%
Support Services (Total Budget £26,846,000)	-0.97%
Cultural Services (Total Budget £925,000)	-0.93%
Customer Care (Total Budget £2,065,000)	-0.91%
Music (Total Budget £126,000)	-0.86%
Tourism & Heritage (Total Budget £399,000)	-0.78%
Leisure (Total Budget £4,315,000)	-0.60%
Access, Engagement & Inclusion (Total £9,169,000)	-0.60%
Planning (Total Budget £617,000)	-0.59%
School Support Services (Total Budget £12,248,000)	-0.56%

- The services that received the smallest % decrease in average budget were;

Service Item	Average Change %
Highways (Total Budget £8,486,000)	+0.11%
Children's Services (Total Budget £18,439,000)	-0.05%
Children Looked After (Total Budget £26,786,000)	-0.07%
Apprenticeship Scheme (Total Budget £220,000)	-0.07%
Schools (Total Budget £151,377,000)	-0.21%
Regeneration (Total Budget £1,502,000)	-0.21%
Equipment and Adaptations (Total Budget £1,850,000)	-0.22%
Residential & Nursing Services (Total Budget £24,305,000)	-0.23%
Homecare (Total Budget £20,211,000)	-0.26%
Recycling (Total Budget £8,848,000)	-0.27%

- A 3% increase in Council Tax had been factored into the budget simulator as it was used for modelling purposes in calculating the budget gap of £3.8m. Taking this into account the average Council tax increase was reported to be 4.22%. In addition, 51.5% of respondents to the online questionnaire and roadshow participants suggested that they would be happy with an increase of over 3%. All members of the OPAG group agreed that a 3% rise was acceptable.
- 82% of respondents felt that the Council should maintain as many services at the current level as possible, even if it means a reasonable increase in Council Tax.
- The majority of respondents felt that the Council should focus on the key themes, especially Early Intervention and Prevention and Efficiency (89%)

	Yes (%)	No (%)	DK (%)
Digitalisation	78	16	6
Early Intervention and Prevention	89	4	7
Commercialisation	64	23	13
Efficiency	89	5	6
Independence	67	20	13

- 83% of respondents agreed that the Council should continue its investment programme.
- Respondents at the roadshows were told about the investments that the Council proposed to make in 2018/19. In terms of education, there were positive comments with regards to investment in schools, including the 21st

Century School programme, although there were some concerns about the size of the schools and the wide range of ages of the pupils.

- There was widespread support for further investment in apprenticeships and the graduate schemes, with respondents expressing the importance of them for young people (and older people) and also a need for the Council and other businesses in the private sector to be involved.
- There were mixed opinions on the investment in roads, with respondents stating that they had seen improvements in certain areas, but there was a definite need for further investment. Potholes continue to be a perceived issue.
- A large number of positive responses were made by those respondents who use leisure services, including the investments in 3G pitches.
- Participants who had young children/grandchildren had mainly seen improvements in play areas and those that hadn't stated that they would like investment to continue in this area, so that other parks could be improved next year.
- When discussing the investment in streetscape in the town centres, the majority of people felt that this was a good idea and had made a difference. However, when discussing town centre regeneration more generally, comments were not always as positive, with many referring to a lack of shops and high business rates.
- The comments about the grants and loans for housing focussed upon using appropriate brownfield sites, that there are too many houses in some areas without the associated amenities and in other areas there were not enough houses.
- The schools budget is proposed to increase by £1million. Respondents were asked if they thought that this increase was reasonable for schools, 63% said they agreed.
- Respondents were asked to state services that they would want to protect from an increase in charge. School meal charges received the largest response.

Service to Protect from increase in charge	No.
School Meals	19
Leisure	10
Car Parking	9
Homecare	6
Meals on Wheels	2
Sports Pitches	2
Bulky collections	1

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This report presents the findings of the Annual Budget Strategy Consultation for 2018/19, which was undertaken to support the decision making process, required to set the Council's budget for the coming financial year.
- 1.2 Section 2 outlines some brief background to the consultation process.
- 1.3 Section 3 details the methodology.
- 1.4 Section 4 and 5 provide the results of the online budget simulator exercise and the accompanying questionnaire.
- 1.5 Section 6 presents the feedback received at the engagement roadshow events and the Older Persons Advisory Group meeting.
- 1.6 Section 7 provides some feedback from engagement with young people.
- 1.7 Section 8 provides the results of some questions posted on social media.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 For the financial year 2018/19 the Council must decide upon its Budget Strategy and priorities.
- 2.2 The Council faces an initial budget gap of approximately £3.8M for 2018/19, which it needs to reduce in order to meet the requirement of setting a legally balanced budget.
- 2.3 The consultation is an essential part of the budget setting process and assists the Cabinet with its deliberations, prior to constructing the final revenue budget strategy for the financial year ending 31st March 2019.
- 2.4 The Council has already undertaken thorough spending reviews but has not yet made a final decision. The purpose of the consultation was therefore to seek the views of the residents of Rhondda Cynon Taf.
- 2.5 The consultation process aimed to provide residents with enough information on the Council's budget, including where and how the Council's money is spent, to enable people to more easily understand and take part in the budget engagement.
- 2.6 The Council's budget consultation ran from 6th November to the 18th December 2017.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 The Council's budget consultation ran from 6th November to the 18th December 2017.

3.2 The aims of the consultation were to;

- Inform and raise awareness of the budget setting process and the difficult decisions that need to be made
- Outline the current budget by service area and to ask people to think about which services are the most important to them
- Ask people for views on Council Tax levels
- Ask people for their views on Council investment areas
- Ask people for their views on the 5 key ways of working that aim to maximise resources and deliver improved services.
- Increase the levels of engagement on previous years.

3.3 The following methods were used to consult with stakeholders;

- An online Budget Simulator
- A number of Town Centre, Leisure Centre and Library events
- Member led Engagement Events
- Promotion through Social media, including a Youtube video
- Questions/polls on social media
- A Young Person's Budget Engagement Event and school event
- Older Persons Advisory Group Meeting
- Promotion with the Citizen's Panel.

3.4 The Budget Simulator outlined a range of services that the Council provides and their associated budgets and then asked people to make £3.8m of savings by adjusting the budget for each service, as well as the level of council tax. The simulator allowed respondents to;

- See current Council service spend
- See the consequences of increasing or decreasing funding for each service
- Suggest savings in specific services
- Set a hypothetical legally balanced budget
- Provide comments on the services.

3.5 The following engagement events took place during the consultation;

Member led Events

DATE	Detail/Events
Thursday 30th November	Mountain Ash Day Centre
Tuesday 5th December	Park and Dare Theatre, Treorchy

Town Centre Roadshows

DATE	Detail/Events
Friday 17th November	Talbot Green Retail Park
Friday 1st December	Mountain Ash
Friday 8th December	Tonypandy

Libraries

DATE	Detail/Events
Thursday 16th November	Pontypridd
Tuesday 21st November	Hirwaun
Thursday 23rd November	Abercynon
Friday 24th November	Ferndale
Wednesday 29th November	Pontyclun
Monday 18th December	Church village
Monday 15th December	Treorchy
Tuesday 12th December	Porth
Tuesday 12th December	Rhydyfelin
Wednesday 13th December	Aberdare

Leisure Centres

DATE	Detail/Events
Tuesday 14th November	Hawthorn Leisure Centre
Thursday 16th November	Llantrisant Leisure Centre
Monday 20th November	Rhondda Fach Sports Centre
Wednesday 22nd November	Tonyrefail Leisure Centre
Tuesday 28th November	Rhondda Sports Centre
Thursday 30th November	Sobell Leisure Centre

- 3.6 The Town Centre events were held in the Council's Environmental Services trailer vehicle. Members of the public were invited into the trailer to have a discussion with Officers and Members about the Council's budget, investments and any problems or queries they may have had. Budget boards were designed to create an interactive activity for people to leave comments and ideas and these were noted for this report.
- 3.7 The RCT County Wide Youth Forum discussed the budget through interactive keypads and a discussion led by a Council Officer.
- 3.8 Discussions were also held with a meeting of the Older Persons' Advisory Group (OPAG) on the 22nd November 2017.
- 3.9 All responses and comments will be made available to Cabinet Members and Officers to aid decision making.
- 3.10 Over 1500 people were engaged in the budget setting process.

4. BUDGET SIMULATOR RESULTS

Responses received

- 4.1 167 responses were received from the budget simulator with submitted budgets. In addition, 2329 people viewed the simulator, whilst not necessarily completing and submitting a budget (google analytics data).

The Overall Budget

- 4.2 As can be seen in the table below the overall average budget was reduced by the 167 respondents who attempted to balance the budget. The average income increased by £1,792,976 and the average revised expenditure put forward showed a decrease of £1,242,451. The increase in total income from the simulator, is made up of a council tax increase of £932,048 and the use of transitional funding of £860,928.

Original Total Income	£	80,134,000
Original Total Expenditure	£	388,958,000
Average Revised Total Income	£	81,926,976
Average Revised Total Expenditure	£	387,715,549

Table 1: The overall budget

Overall Summary of Services

4.3 The table below shows the average percentage change of all service areas included in the simulator. All service areas received a reduction in their budget, except for Highways, which received a small increase of 0.11%. A summary of the services with the highest and lowest decrease are shown on the next page.

Education and Skills (Expenditure)	
Schools (Total Budget £151,377,000)	-0.21%
School Support Services (Total Budget £12,248,000)	-0.56%
Libraries & Adult Learning (Total Budget £2,447,000)	-0.46%
Apprenticeship Scheme (Total Budget £220,000)	-0.07%
Youth Provision (Total Budget £2,031,000)	-0.40%
Access, Engagement & Inclusion (Total £9,169,000)	-0.60%
Adult Social Care (Expenditure)	
Assessment Care Management (Total Budget £7,172,000)	-0.30%
Residential & Nursing Services (Total Budget £24,305,000)	-0.23%
Supported Accommodation (Total Budget £10,602,000)	-0.29%
Homecare (Total Budget £20,211,000)	-0.26%
Day Care Services (Total Budget £6,313,000)	-0.49%
Equipment and Adaptations (Total Budget £1,850,000)	-0.22%
Care Support & Other Services (Total Budget £6,329,000)	-0.34%
Children's Services and Wellbeing (Expenditure)	
Children's Services (Total Budget £18,439,000)	-0.05%
Children Looked After (Total Budget £26,786,000)	-0.07%
Public Health (Total Budget £4,900,000)	-0.39%
Housing (Total Budget £996,000)	-0.32%
Parks (Total Budget £5,527,000)	-0.56%
Frontline Services (Expenditure)	
Highways (Total Budget £8,486,000)	0.11%
Streetcare (Total Budget £3,969,000)	-0.43%
Recycling (Total Budget £8,848,000)	-0.27%
Waste (Black bags) (Total Budget £5,567,000)	-1.02%
Transport (Total Budget £14,371,000)	-0.50%
Customer Care (Total Budget £2,065,000)	-0.91%
Support Services (Total Budget £26,846,000)	-0.97%
Leisure, Culture and Regeneration (Expenditure)	
Tourism & Heritage (Total Budget £399,000)	-0.78%
Cultural Services (Total Budget £925,000)	-0.93%
Planning (Total Budget £617,000)	-0.59%
Regeneration (Total Budget £1,502,000)	-0.21%
Leisure (Total Budget £4,315,000)	-0.60%
Music (Total Budget £126,000)	-0.86%

Table 2: Overall summary of all services

- 4.4 The **top 10 services** that received the largest % decrease in average budget were;

Service Item	Average Change %
Waste (Black bags) (Total Budget £5,567,000)	-1.02%
Support Services (Total Budget £26,846,000)	-0.97%
Cultural Services (Total Budget £925,000)	-0.93%
Customer Care (Total Budget £2,065,000)	-0.91%
Music (Total Budget £126,000)	-0.86%
Tourism & Heritage (Total Budget £399,000)	-0.78%
Leisure (Total Budget £4,315,000)	-0.60%
Access, Engagement & Inclusion (Total £9,169,000)	-0.60%
Planning (Total Budget £617,000)	-0.59%
School Support Services (Total Budget £12,248,000)	-0.56%

Table 3: Services receiving largest % decrease in average budget

- 4.5 The services that received the smallest % decrease in average budget were;

Service Item	Average Change %
Highways (Total Budget £8,486,000)	+0.11%
Children's Services (Total Budget £18,439,000)	-0.05%
Children Looked After (Total Budget £26,786,000)	-0.07%
Apprenticeship Scheme (Total Budget £220,000)	-0.07%
Schools (Total Budget £151,377,000)	-0.21%
Regeneration (Total Budget £1,502,000)	-0.21%
Equipment and Adaptations (Total Budget £1,850,000)	-0.22%
Residential & Nursing Services (Total Budget £24,305,000)	-0.23%
Homecare (Total Budget £20,211,000)	-0.26%
Recycling (Total Budget £8,848,000)	-0.27%

Table 4: Services receiving smallest % decrease in average budget

Analysis by Service Groups

Education and Skills

4.6 The education and skills budget expenditure was reduced on average by -0.26%, the reductions vary from -0.60% for Access Engagement & Inclusion to -0.07% for the apprenticeship scheme.

Service Item	Average Change %
Education and Skills (Expenditure)	-0.26%
Schools (Total Budget £151,377,000)	-0.21%
School Support Services (Total Budget £12,248,000)	-0.56%
Libraries & Adult Learning (Total Budget £2,447,000)	-0.46%
Apprenticeship Scheme (Total Budget £220,000)	-0.07%
Youth Provision (Total Budget £2,031,000)	-0.40%
Access, Engagement & Inclusion (Total £9,169,000)	-0.60%

Table 5: Average change % for Education and Skills

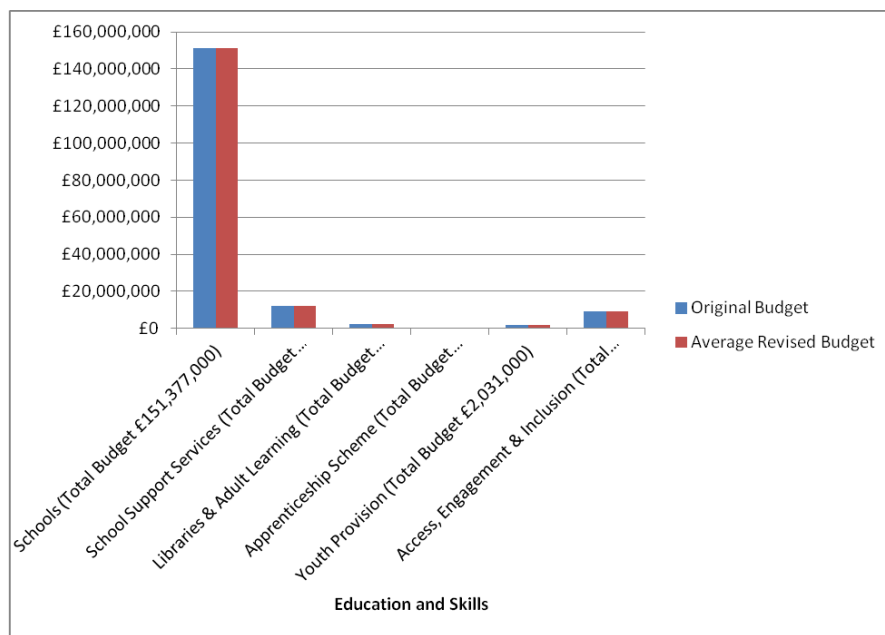


Figure 1 –Education and Skills Budget Change

Education and Skills Comments

- 4.7 The following are a selection of comments made in the budget simulator;

Schools

Some of the comments suggested that school budgets had been protected in the past and this may need to change with the continuing Council budget gap;

"I think Schools have become complacent in being protected and need to understand that ALL services are facing problems."

"Education has been protected from the hardest cuts for long enough and need to become leaner like many other Council services."

"Schools need to manage their budgets better, they have enough income just do not always spend it well."

Other comments on the schools budget included;

"Rhondda schools are already amalgamating into newer, larger centers to cater for 5-16 year olds. This model should be replicated across the county to maximise efficiency savings"

"Digitalise resources. create hubs for people who are unable to access from their home...."

"I'm sure a large amount of money could be saved by ensuring that lighting in schools and colleges are turned off when not in use"

"Schools must be protected but from my experience school support services, on the whole do not provide value for money"

Apprenticeships

"Apprenticeships are the way forward. There are too many people going to University and getting into debt or can't afford to go or even don't really want to go but they don't have many other option".

"An increase in the apprenticeship scheme would provide greater opportunities for young people to develop skills that will assist in gaining employment and contributing further to the local community".

Adult Social Care

4.8 The Adult Social Care budget was reduced on average by -0.28%, the reductions vary from -0.49% for Day Care Services to -0.22% for Equipment & Adaptations

Service Item	Average Change %
Adult Social Care (Expenditure)	-0.28%
Assessment Care Management (Total Budget £7,172,000)	-0.30%
Residential & Nursing Services (Total Budget £24,305,000)	-0.23%
Supported Accommodation (Total Budget £10,602,000)	-0.29%
Homecare (Total Budget £20,211,000)	-0.26%
Day Care Services (Total Budget £6,313,000)	-0.49%
Equipment and Adaptations (Total Budget £1,850,000)	-0.22%
Care Support & Other Services (Total Budget £6,329,000)	-0.34%

Table 6: Average change % for Adult Social Care

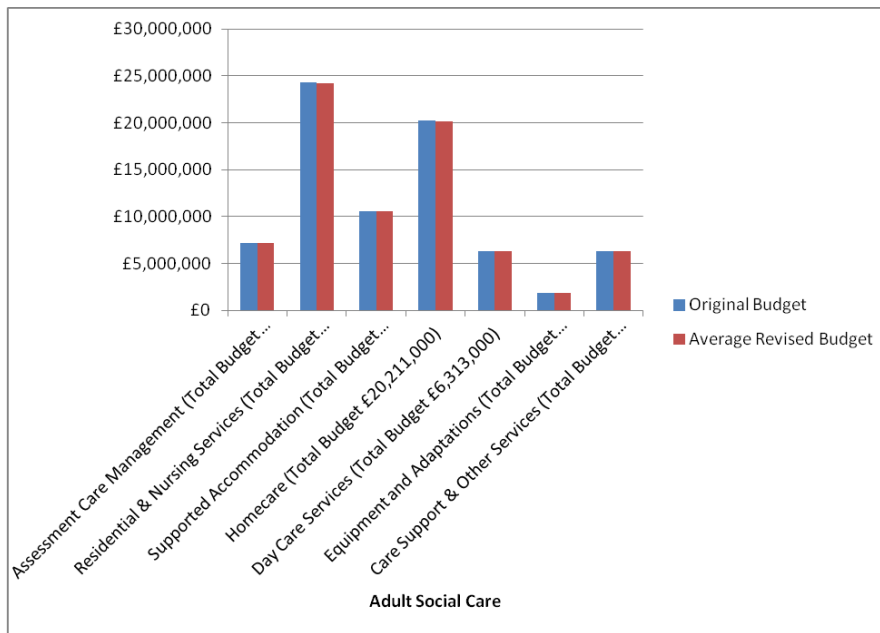


Figure 2 –Adult Social Care Budget Change

Adult and Social Care comments

- 4.9 The following are a selection of comments made in the budget simulator;

Overall

“Adult social care is very important in these difficult times - the elderly and disabled in RCT deserve all the help they can get, as do their families”

“Difficult one but again like Education, this service has been protected from cuts for years. I understand need is increasing but the services haven't had the need to cut and look at efficiency savings yet”

“Nursing homes charge extortionate rates, and the care in them is not always to a good standard.”

Independent Living

“.....Supported Accom with nursing facilities would also ease the pressure on the NHS and allow elderly people to stay in the communities they have grown up in and have family around them. People should not be expected to move out of their area and start again at their time of life.”

“Reducing supported accommodation and day care services would limit opportunities for some, however no reductions in other areas would still allow for people to have assistance in living independently ensuring that their basic needs are still being met.”

Equipment & Adaptations

“Councils give equipment, aids and adaptations too freely”.

Children's Services and Wellbeing

4.10 The Children's Services and Wellbeing budget was reduced on average by 0.14%, the reductions vary from -0.56% for Parks to 0.05% for Children's Services.

Service Item	Average Change %
Children's Services and Wellbeing (Expenditure)	-0.14%
Children's Services (Total Budget £18,439,000)	-0.05%
Children Looked After (Total Budget £26,786,000)	-0.07%
Public Health (Total Budget £4,900,000)	-0.39%
Housing (Total Budget £996,000)	-0.32%
Parks (Total Budget £5,527,000)	-0.56%

Table 7: Average change % for Children's Services and Wellbeing

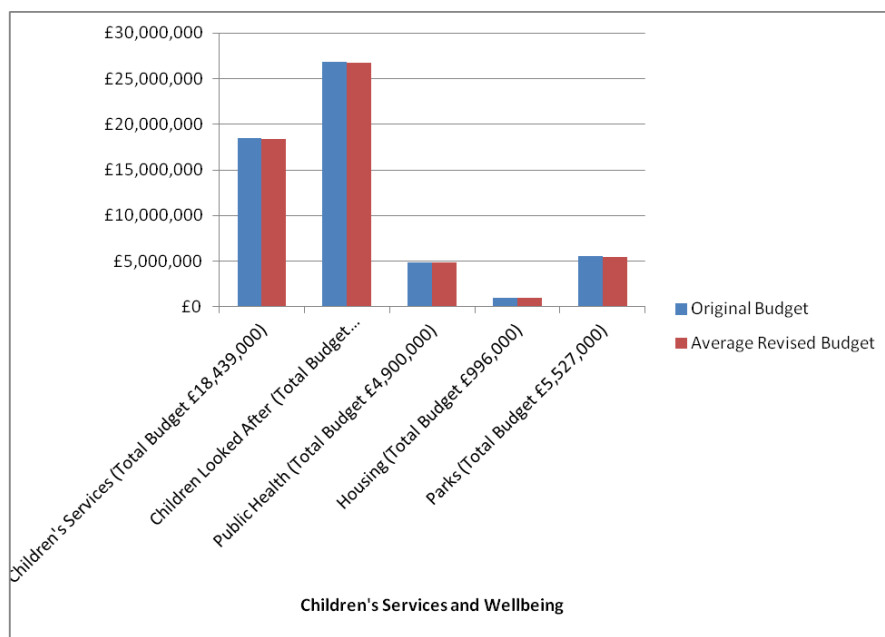


Figure 3 –Children's Services and Wellbeing Budget Change

Children's Services and Wellbeing comments

4.11 The following are a selection of comments made in the budget simulator;

Overall

"Can't reduce these services any further."

Children's Services

"Services for the most disadvantaged children are important, and should be exempted from budget cuts. Those in need of housing also deserve access to good-quality accommodation."

Parks

"Engage with community groups to assist the council with the upkeep"

"new parks are being damaged by children/teenagers, and these are areas where they hang about and commit issues..."

"Parks and play areas have already had enough investment in them"

"Finally our parks have already received significant cuts and should be protected."

Frontline Services

4.12 The Frontline Services budget was reduced on average by -0.63%, the reductions vary from -1.02% for waste (black bags) to an increase of 0.11% for Highways.

Service Item	Average Change %
Frontline Services (Expenditure)	-0.63%
Highways (Total Budget £8,486,000)	0.11%
Streetcare (Total Budget £3,969,000)	-0.43%
Recycling (Total Budget £8,848,000)	-0.27%
Waste (Black bags) (Total Budget £5,567,000)	-1.02%
Transport (Total Budget £14,371,000)	-0.50%
Customer Care (Total Budget £2,065,000)	-0.91%
Support Services (Total Budget £26,846,000)	-0.97%

Table 8: Average change % for Frontline Services

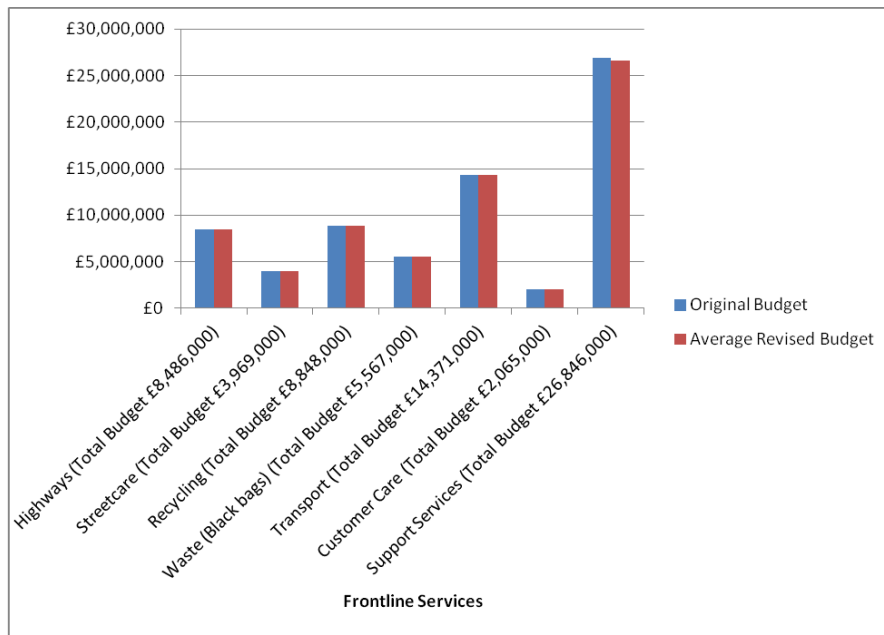


Figure 4 - Frontline Services Budget Change

Frontline Services comments

4.13 The following are a selection of comments made in the budget simulator;

General

“All the items above are very important for the local community- especially transport”

Recycling

“Recycling reduced but cheap leaflet drops could still be done and advertising on bin lorries”

“Collect and separate more efficiently at recycling plants”

“Recycling has become the norm for most households”

Waste

“collect black bags every 3 wks not 2wks”

“Efficiency would reduce the budget, bins could be collected every 3wks”

“Waste black bag collection increase to 3 wks.”

Transport

“As a commuter, I have noticed a significant increase in congestion between the Rhondda and all routes to Cardiff..... As such, highways should receive additional investment, as should public transport initiatives. This money should come from the large housing developments springing up in Taff Ely - which are likely the cause of this congestion.”

Customer Care

“Get better online service that reduces pressure on the front line.”

Leisure Culture and Regeneration

4.14 The Leisure, Culture and Regeneration budget was reduced on average by -0.58%, the reductions vary from -0.93% for Cultural services to -0.21% for Regeneration.

Service Item	Average Change %
Leisure, Culture and Regeneration (Expenditure)	-0.58%
Tourism & Heritage (Total Budget £399,000)	-0.78%
Cultural Services (Total Budget £925,000)	-0.93%
Planning (Total Budget £617,000)	-0.59%
Regeneration (Total Budget £1,502,000)	-0.21%
Leisure (Total Budget £4,315,000)	-0.60%
Music (Total Budget £126,000)	-0.86%

Table 9: Average change % for Leisure, Culture and Regeneration

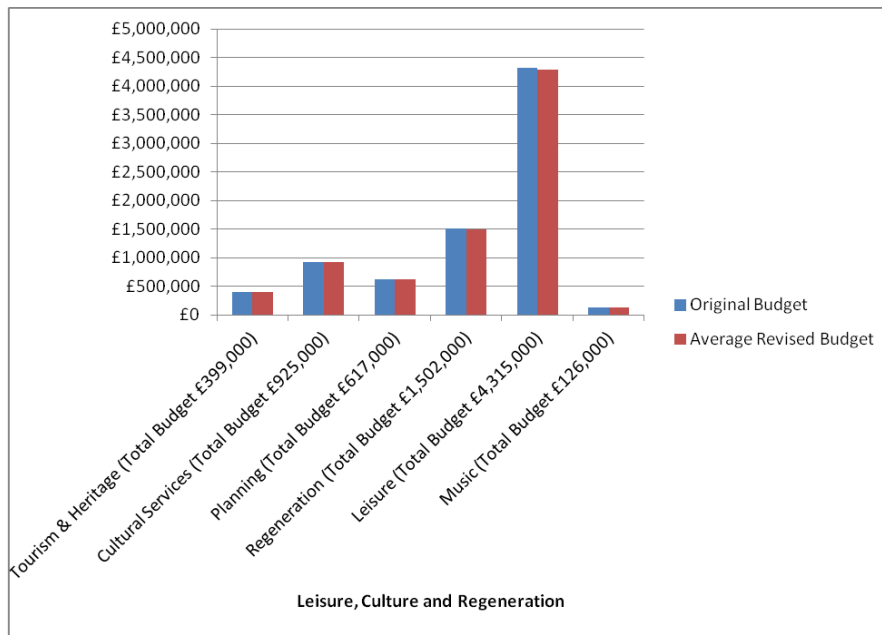


Figure 5: Leisure, Culture and Regeneration Budget Change

4.15 The following are a selection of comments made in the budget simulator;

Leisure, Culture and Regeneration comments

Overall

“These are non-essential services. They all need money to invest in to make more money but enough money has been put into leisure. I think the services are fantastic. We don't need any more investment for the time being. The money made should be enough to maintain services at the current level.”

“Those individuals who use these facilities should pay a little extra”

Tourism

“Tourism should be invested in, lets bring more tourists to the area.....”

Regeneration

“Economic regeneration is not discretionary anymore, because of the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act.....”

Leisure

“Leisure has been greatly improved.”

“Possibly, the authority could work more closely with the health authority to look at providing cheaper health and leisure initiatives in the community (e.g. organising local walking groups to improve fitness in older people, rather than always providing services in leisure centres.....”

Libraries

“Libraries are the most important facility..... also a centre for information for the locality”

Music

“if individuals want to use Leisure and music facilities a small rise in fees is acceptable.”

Transitional Funding

4.16 Respondents who completed the budget simulator felt that the budget gap, at least in part could use some of the transitional funding available. Respondents had the option of using 0%, 50% or 100% of the transitional funding of £3.8M available. The average percentage change suggested was an increase of 22.46% which would result in using additional transitional funding of £860.928.

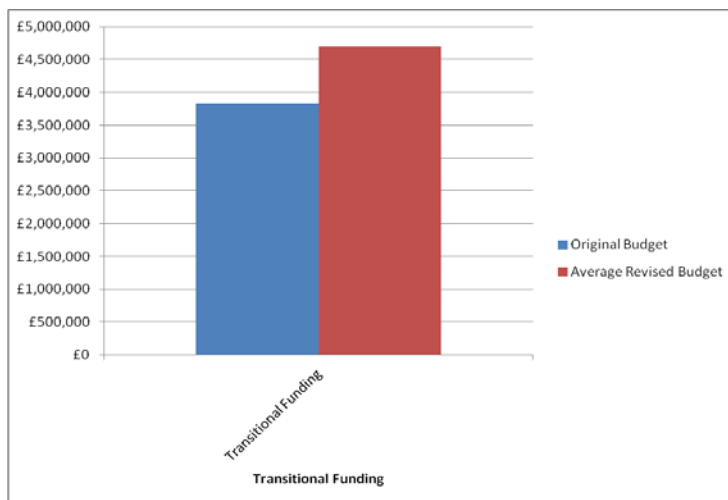


Figure 6: Transitional Funding

Comments on Transitional Funding

4.17 The following are a selection of comments;

“Do what you need to do to protect services”

“I would like to see Transitional funding spent on things that could save the Council money in the future, such as installing solar panels on buildings, low energy lighting etc. That way costs can be reduced across the board without affecting future service outcomes.”

“If it maintains service levels and helps towards areas that need funding then this would be a choice...”

“If the authority could not afford to cut school funding by 3%, then this should be seen as an option”

“Why hold on to it every year, ease the burden on council tax”

“If you are holding these funds and have had interest on the money it should be used to ease the budget”

Council Tax

4.18 A 3% increase in Council Tax had been factored in to the budget simulator as it was used for modelling purposes in calculating the budget gap of £3.8m. Taking this into account the average % change increase in Council tax was reported to be 4.22%.

	Average Change %
	1.22%
Taking account of 3% used for modelling purposes	4.22%

Table 10: Average change % for Council Tax

4.19 The following chart shows that the extra income from Council Tax (based on this level of increase) would be £932,048.

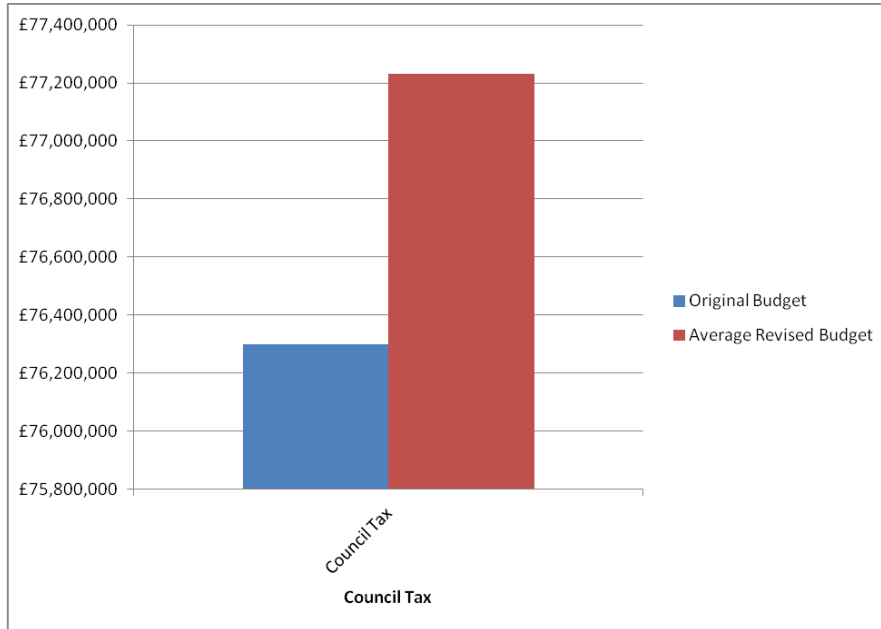


Figure 7: Income from Council Tax

4.20 The following are a selection of comments that were suggested alongside the Council tax submitted changes in the budget simulator.

Those in favour of an increase;

“5% max”

“Around 3% to 4%”

“I can personally stomach the extra cost here if I know that services have been protected. Whatever inflation is for the year is an acceptable benchmark to use to work out the increase.”

As long as there is an associated improvement or maintaining of service standards;

“I feel that everyone should pay a little extra to maintain current services”

“if cuts are limited then a 4% rise would be acceptable”

"Although a rise in council tax will hurt a little cuts in frontline services will hurt more."

"I don't mind paying a small amount more if it helps to protect services"

"I would rather see an increase in Council Tax to protect services and people's jobs."

A number of respondents felt that the Council Tax Banding system was unfair, between bands and compared to other Councils;

"As one of the highest Council Tax rates in Wales RCT should minimise the increase again. Why should people of RCT pay more than people of Cardiff for the same band?!?!"

"council tax percentage is unfair, everybody should pay the same amount irrespective of what type of home you have"

"Percentage rise unfair, somebody with a family of 4 living in a band (A) 4 bedroom property uses more of the services than a 4 bedroom property band (D) with 2 adults everyone should pay the same amount"

A number of comments suggested that there should be no increase or a small increase, as people are struggling in the current financial climate;

"Residents have been punished enough through reduction in services."

"Already too high for a deprived area of Wales!"

Communication

"try to show through all means of communications where our rct council is providing good services"

"We're nearly there with the savings. DO NOT cut anything else, put up the Council Tax and promote what you provide to people so they can see how they benefit from paying the Council Tax. If people knew (not many people do) then they wouldn't begrudge paying it so much!"

5. Questionnaire Results

- 5.1 Once respondents had completed the budget simulator, they were given the opportunity to answer a number of questions about the budget and council priorities.

Council Tax

- 5.2 Respondents were asked what their preferred level of Council Tax increase for next year would be. The results show that 31% of respondents answering this question said that their preferred increase would be 5%, with 30% suggesting 3%.

Preferred level of Council Tax increase	Count	%
0%	19	18
1%	19	18
3%	32	30
5%	33	31
Over 5%	5	5
Base	108	100

Table 11 – Preferred level of Council Tax increase (Questionnaire)

- 5.3 82% of respondents felt that the Council should maintain as many services at the current level as possible, even if it means a reasonable increase in Council Tax.

Option	No.	%
Maintain services	86	82
Cut services	19	18
Base	105	100

A selection of comments can be found below.

Agree

“Hold council tax increases to under 4% max”

“Between 3% and 4% is ok if services will not be cut”

“I don't want to pay more but don't want to see people without jobs and/or services.”

"I would rather pay more and stop the cuts and see the investment now taking place continuing".

"It's not ideal to pay more in Council Tax, but neither is losing services, so if we have to pay a little more then so be it."

"Keep any rise under 5% but make a small increase if it stops cuts being made"

"Thank you for allowing me to express my opinion. I sincerely hope that as many people as possible take part in this great idea, and hope that the real wishes of our electors are achieved."

Disagree

Of those who disagreed with a council tax rise, the following are a selection of comments;

"We currently pay too much c/t for the services we receive. Cut your cloth accordingly. Reductions in services = reductions in number of managers/directors = enhanced savings."

"you will only waste the extra money on new desks and chairs for upper management"

The Council's Priorities

5.4 The Council's Corporate Plan (2016 – 2020) sets out what the Council's vision means for people across 3 **Priorities**. These priorities have been decided based on information that residents have already told us about their needs.

- **Economy** - Building a strong economy
- **People** - Promoting independence and positive lives for everyone
- **Place** - Creating neighbourhoods where people are proud to live and work

5.5 To support the delivery of the plan and these priorities, in the context of funding reductions, increasing demand and rising cost pressures, the Council is focusing on five key areas to maximise resources and deliver improved services.

- **Digitalisation** – making services by creating an agile workforce and increasing opportunities for residents to interact with us online
- **Early Intervention and Prevention** – invest in services which allow us to solve issues before they escalate
- **Commercialisation** – offer some of our services on a commercial basis to lessen the impact of budget reductions

- **Efficiency** – continue to deliver millions of pounds worth of efficiencies each year – since 2012 we have saved over £30 million in this way
- **Independence** – invest in community based services which will support individuals and couples to remain independent

5.6 Respondents were asked if they thought the Council should focus on these key areas. As you can see the majority of respondents felt that the Council should focus on these areas, especially Early Intervention and Prevention and Efficiency (89%)

	Yes (%)	No (%)	DK (%)
Digitalisation	78	16	6
Early Intervention and Prevention	89	4	7
Commercialisation	64	23	13
Efficiency	89	5	6
Independence	67	20	13

Council Investment Opportunities

5.7 Respondents were asked if they thought that the Council's investment in the following areas should be continued.

Education - Improving School Facilities
Housing grants – Grants to tackle empty properties
Employment – Apprenticeships & Graduate positions
Highways – road improvements
Regeneration of towns and village centres
Leisure Centres & outdoor leisure facilities (3G Pitches)
Play areas
Strategic Projects, e.g. Taff Vale precinct, M.Ash Cross Valley Link

Continue investment?	Count	%
Yes	85	83
No	11	11
Don't know	7	7
Total respondents	103	100

5.8 83% of respondents agreed that the Council should continue to invest in these areas.

5.9 Respondents were also asked if they had seen improvements in any of the areas above as a result of the investment, the following are a selection of the comments received;

Overall/Other

"Good to see the investments being made across rct"

"We will need increased numbers of care homes as the older population increases."

Education - Improving School Facilities

"New school looks fantastic and modern along with the college"

"Y Pant school has been rebuilt and pupils have greatly benefitted from improved facilities."

Highways – Road improvements

"Highways - some of the road re-surfacing that has been done leaves a lot to be desired. Yes, money needs to be spent here - but, it needs to be better quality."

"Yes roads seem better than a few years ago"

"Yes roads seem better but only in some areas"

Regeneration

"Regeneration of towns and village centres"

Leisure/3G

"Leisure Centres & outdoor leisure facilities (3G Pitches)"

"Leisure Centres and Parks and Play Areas."

"Sports centre investment has been very positive"

"Leisure Centres - to have improved facilities then the service users (myself included) must expect an increase in charges, no longer should there be a price freeze on membership prices".

Play areas

"Play area investment is making a difference"

"lovely to see new parks for children"

"Play areas - maybe enough has now been done here?"

"Yes play areas in my area have been improved"

5.10 Other areas that were suggested for further investment, included;

- Better roads and transport
- Bus, rail cycling and walking connectivity.
- Environmental Health & more heavy fines for fly tippers.
- Help with grants for us to improve our own properties, not just empty properties, and not just for those on benefits.
- Internet access infrastructure for the most excluded
- Libraries have received many cuts since 2014 and should be protected.
- Music service needs more money
- Transport is a major issue for a lot of people. Maybe the Council need to start looking at more community transport, and running their own transport in some areas to connect people to the main bus routes etc.

The Schools Budget

5.11 The schools budget is proposed to increase by £1million. This is compared to an overall increase in funding the Council has received from Welsh Government of -0.2%. Respondents were asked if they thought that this increase was reasonable for schools, 63% said they agreed.

Is this increase reasonable for schools?

Option	No.	%
Yes	69	63
No	29	27
Don't know	11	10
	109	100

Table 12 – The School Budget

Fees and Charges

5.12 Each year the Council is faced with rising cost pressures and increased demand for services. Fees and Charges provide income which can help the Council to continue to provide important services. Each year the level of these charges are reviewed. Fees and charges for 2018/19 may be increased by RPI, but if there is an opportunity to introduce a smaller increase or freeze charges in some areas we want to know which areas residents would prioritise. Some examples of areas where fees and charges are applied are:

- School Meals
- Summer and Winter Playing Fees (Sports Clubs)
- Leisure Centres Membership

5.13 Respondents were asked to state services that they would want to protect from an increase. School meal charges received the largest response.

Service to Protect from increase in charge	No.
School Meals	19
Leisure	10
Car Parking	9
Homecare	6
Meals on Wheels	2
Sports Pitches	2
Bulky collections	1

Table 13 – Fees and Charges

5.14 The most noted services to protect from any increase in charges were school meals, leisure and car parking.

Some comments included;

“I don't think raising fees would have a significant effect on balancing the budget and would be unfair to those who use the services...”

“Increases by no more than inflation”

“I think all should be increased by RPI”

“Inflation is 3.5% so keep charges at inflation or below”

“Keep price increases in line with or below inflation”

Any other comments:

Respondents were given a final opportunity to provide comments

Reducing the costs of Managers and Councillors

“Cull of officers as Service Manager, Head of Service, Service Director, Group Director level”

“Reduce back office functions and management structures.”

Efficiency Savings

“Increase mobile working and allow Internet Facing Deployments.”

Suggested Budget priorities

“Education and regeneration need to be the key focuses for a bright future for R.C.T”

“.....I would like to see Transitional Funding spent on energy efficiency projects so that tomorrow's budgets are more protected from spending reductions.”

“Outsource legal and HR departments”

6. ENGAGEMENT EVENTS

- 6.1 This section outlines the results of the consultation discussions held in the town centres, leisure centres and libraries along with feedback received from the OPAG meeting.
- 6.2 A large number of engagement events were held right across Rhondda Cynon Taf, the details of which are found in the methodology.
- 6.3 The Roadshow events and the meetings that were held are part of the Council's ongoing approach to face to face resident engagement.
- 6.4 The events used a number of boards to aid discussion and a number of discussion prompts were available to the facilitators.

PART A Results – Council Investment Areas

- 6.5 Respondents were told about the investments that the Council proposed to make in 2018/19.

Education - School Facilities

- 6.6 A selection of comments received at the engagement events are shown below;

Positive

“Essential, yes. Given the wellbeing plan and its priorities on education it would make more sense” OPAG Member

Investment

“Better facilities, more opportunities.”

“Need to invest in schools”

“Happy with prior investment – now reduce it and focus more on maintenance of these properties

“Keep investing in schools & apprenticeships”

“Schools improved buildings + heating, need to keep schools to a good standard so agree with new builds”

21st Century schools

"Maintain for the school investment – more 21st C schools"

"Centralising schools is a must – modern environment etc, it's a success, what's been done in Abercynon is fantastic, have to be careful you don't go too big"

"21st C schools – better, 6th form separate is a good idea"

Quality of education

"Our future is in the hands of the schools"

"Hawthorn primary is slowly improving, there are some good teachers there"

"My granddaughter goes to Cardinal Newman schools and it's a fantastic school."

"School is acting swiftly to resolve issue + happy with facilities"

"Y Pant – education good, new building fantastic, sport & library, 6th form good for computers"

Other

"School buildings used more in the community – super schools could be used more for meetings / events etc."

"More youth services, more adventure playgroups, activities / day trips, focussed on poor family"

"Sell off old school buildings / land, make money"

"Nobody better than RCT in school facilities"

"Increase provision for SEN"

Negative

21st Century Schools / size of schools

"Schools can get too big"

"I don't think the super schools are working, there's a shortage of staff who want to work in a SS"

"Small schools work better as children feel more secure"

"I believe children get a better education in a small school"

"3 – 18 year old schools, too big an age range to bring together"

"Schools – I don't agree with super schools amalgamation of schools, feasibility, traffic, congestion it causes. I don't like the idea of 3 year olds and 18 year olds being the same school being exposed to underage things like smoking etc."

"The super school is having mixed reviews, too many kids in one school"

Investment needed

"Modernisation in schools, Caradog school needs updating – access in Pendarren Street needs to be safer, need road safety outside schools"

"Don't think Penygraig new school is a good investment, younger children find it difficult to get to the school"

"Schools are really important, they always need investment. Schools that amalgamate can sometimes get a bit chaotic"

Apprenticeships/Graduates

- 6.7 There was widespread support for further investment in apprenticeships and the graduate schemes, with respondents expressing the importance of them for young people (and older people) and also a need for the Council and other businesses in the private sector to be involved. Although in agreement, some comments expressed concern over the rate of pay and the opportunity of securing a job at the end of training for graduates. In terms of training, some people felt that training should be longer and that there should be more varied apprenticeships such as IT, nursing, clerical, creative design, plumbing and engineering, with the relevant qualifications to go with them.

Some comments included:

“Increase number of apprenticeships”

“Good idea – try and develop with private businesses”

“Bring back apprenticeships, not everyone is going to go to university, support non-academic children through apprenticeships”

“On the job training with a guaranteed employment is better than a university education”

“More apprenticeships, you have to be a graduate to do everything these days. There were schools for nurses etc now everyone has to have a degree”

“More manual apprenticeships, bricklaying etc, 1 year of training isn’t enough”

“Continue investment in IT + creative designers, engineering, Rhondda benefit from light industry”

“There’s the idea that everyone should go to university there aren’t jobs at the end of it, we need more apprenticeships.”

“Apprenticeships have changed – you need to be guaranteed a job at the end of it”

“Apprenticeships should be available to older people, they need to train older people”

“Should be more for disabled young people”

Road Improvements

- 6.8 There were mixed opinions on the investment the Council had made in roads;

Visible improvements

“Visible improvement in road resurfacing, more investment needed.”

“Maerdy (Mt Rd) has been very good for upper Cynon Valley”

“Mountain road works have improved the area”

“Road improvements are ongoing – I think Aberdare is quite good.”

"Good roads – better gritting – side streets"

"Happy with changes in Carne Street"

Continue with further investment

"Continue to invest in roads, resurfacing"

"More improvements to roads and streets rather than filling in potholes"

"Pavements and roads need doing"

"Compared to England, the roads are well maintained but there are still some potholes that need improving"

"More Capital investment in roads"

*"Upper boat roundabout – congestion got worse. Absolutely invest!
Bodge patching"*

"Traffic into Ponty – bottle neck parking issues for number"

Potholes / resurfacing

"Road improvements need to carry out smaller road repairs rather than so many all at once"

"Continuous maintenance – you'll never win the war – important to keep on top of it. Far too much transport on the roads."

"Desperately need investment, especially pavements. Brynsadler Bridge is terrible – use tarmac not slabs"

"Pothole improvement – invest in new pothole filling machines"

"Potholes. There's one road into the Valleys and one road out. We need to think about the alternative ways in and out of the valleys."

"So many potholes, roads are terrible"

Parking / obstructions / car parks

"Car parks – resident was not given option for short stay only 4 hours so did not stay in the town centre"

"Restrictions need to be enforced more as cars cause problems for wheelchairs + prams"

"Cars parking on pavements especially outside of schools – someone will die – it's dangerous. Road markings need to be clearer!"

"They are dipping the pavements for wheelchairs but people obstruct them"

Road closures

"Road improvements & road closures need to be planned with common sense. Works seem to clash and you can't seem to go alternative routes"

"Timing of road closures / works needs to be better"

Transport

"Bus links – 1hr 20mins (Cardiff) used to be express service – 1 hour. No CTax inc"

"No direct bus to Cardiff or Swansea from Aberdare"

"Transport link – rail bus stopped. Other valleys better – Rhondda Fach less facilities"

"The bus service is brilliant, we get buses every 10 minutes and trains every 30 minutes as long as transport can run on the roads it's fine"

"Better transport lately"

"Transport – trains are terrible"

Cycling tracks

"Cycling on roads, appalling, roads not built for cars + bicycles. All new roads should have cycle track."

“Cycle paths – invest in cycle paths”

“How come the bypass in Porth was built without a cycle path? All new roads should have them now.”

Leisure Centres/3G pitches

- 6.9 A large number of positive responses were made by those respondents who use leisure services;

Visible improvements / happy with investment

“Happy with investment”

“Leisure centres investment is good, for all people, doctor referrals, free swimming”

“Leisure centres have been invested in loads”

“Happy with leisure services, I use Abercynon & Aberdare, Hawthorn”

“Leisure – promote good health to reduce health service costs”

“Leisure centre investment – good for areas / residents”

“Investment in Leisure Centres – they’re doing really well – free swim, I think is good”

“Improvements to sport centres are fantastic. The leisure membership allows me to go to all the leisure centres in RCT. I think the opening hours are a bit strange ion some centres.”

“Leisure – Hawthorn – good investment, wonderful sauna + steam room, reassurance from investment, good for mental health services + community interactions”

Swimming pool / swimming lessons

“Free swimming lessons are brilliant – it’s important”

“Free swim in leisure centres should be scrapped. It gives you a false pretence – it’s the only time the pool in RF is busy”

“School contracts – swimming lessons – keeping pool open”

"More help for swim clubs funding"

"Invest in swimming pools"

3G pitches

"3G pitches good idea"

"3G is great but they need to change opening hours for more usage."

"3G pitch charges to pay for a set amount of time"

"3G pitches – good idea, agree with all"

"Good that 3G are being invested in, but feels there needs to be real pitches kept"

Leisure for Life card / membership / costs

"Need to re-look at leisure membership pricing strategies. Its' too expensive to pay £5+ for a session but not everyone wants a membership"

"Leisure centres are the best thing offered by the Council. Look at a corporate membership for school pupils"

"Improve leisure for Life card"

"Fees are too high if you have a lot of children"

More investment needed

"Sports pitch changing rooms for refereeing not good + showers cold– Ystrad SC, Blaenrhondda Park, disgusting / dirty"

"There should be a bit more money spent in Rhondda SC changing areas"

"Abercynon + Hawthorn – definite improvement, welcome investment in leisure. Lido should be open all year around and should charge people"

"Leisure facilities needed for Mountain Ash"

*“Ongoing rooms need investment particularly Ystrad”
 “Leisure centres need to be more innovative with investment. Too many gyms – need new things like climbing walls & ski slopes. Agree with 3G pitches.”*

“More open access but they have to be looked after by those who use it

Health suite

“New Jacuzzi for Tonyrefail. Pool shut at 4pm – doesn’t fit in with schools, kids can’t go after school”

“What’s the point in going to the sauna if you can’t use the pool?”

“Shouldn’t be closing saunas etc in LC’s”

Play Areas

- 6.10 Participants who had young children/grandchildren had mainly seen improvements in play areas and those that hadn’t stated that they would like investment to continue in this area, so that other parks could be improved year.

Positive

“They did work to Gelli Park a few years ago, it looks good.”

“Can see the investment being made in play areas.”

“Play area good, just been done”

“Ponty park + Aberdare park are brilliant + the staff are great.”

“Play areas have been done to death, they are all brand new”

“The community of Hawthorn / Rhydyfelin raised £100,000 to put in new play equipment and the Council did all the work for free. Brilliant.”

“Trealaw is lovely, nice play area, need to make sure park is not damaged”

“For a long time, stuff was all the same, it’s all changed now and it’s marvellous”

"Excellent play areas which have been installed, excellent in Pontyclun"

Negative

"Could be improved more"

"Where are kids supposed to go? New housing estates have got private parks but only children from the area of new houses can go and use it."

"Play areas are important you need to look ahead at the youngsters."

"Play areas – difficult to keep older kids out – link to apprentices – play parks"

"Too many play areas in this borough – kids focus is elsewhere, i.e rugby / gym classes and digital equipment – don't want to go out and play"

"It took the Council all of the school holidays to improve the play area in Bronwydd Park, as soon as school started they opened it up again"

"Lot for young children – gap for 9 – 13"

Other

"Encourage YP hanging around the streets to take part in sports/ fields etc. It's very tribal – football / Rugby – how do we get out of that?"

"Youth clubs have gone. There was so much to do when I was a youngster. YP are saying they've got nothing to do!"

"My son is autistic but it's difficult to find places for him to go. It was ok when he was younger... I want him to develop social skills. It's the Social things we're struggling with."

"More disabled facilities / equipment. But doesn't need much more investment"

"Paddling pools for older kids aren't a good idea as you can't swim in them; you just go to the pool"

"Current climate – reluctance to let children go out unsupervised, some areas attract group gatherings"

Regeneration of Town Centres

- 6.11 When discussing the investment in streetscape in the town centres, the majority of people felt that this was a good idea and had made a difference.

Positive

"Happy with current regeneration"

"What they are doing in Ponty is impressive, but town centres like Porth & Ponty need more."

"All for the regeneration of Tonypandy"

"De pedestrianisation is welcomed. Walk surely + maintain the road"

"Town centres have been tidied up a lot, encourage people to have self ownership of shops, you tend to treat it with more pride if you own it and live there."

"Street lighting reductions have been well received in the area"

"Regeneration of shops incentive for people to shop locally"

- 6.12 Although there were some issues identified with the paving;

"Paving stone issues in Pontypridd, issues with Kerbs" (OPAG)

Negative

- 6.13 When discussing town centre regeneration more generally, comments were not always as positive, with many referring to a lack of shops and high business rates;

N.B all comments including those relating to specific towns can be found in the appendix.

Regeneration ideas / main comments

1. Out of town shopping is affecting towns
2. More investment needed in towns to attract new businesses
3. Better shops – more variety needed
4. Reductions in rates & rent
5. Cheaper car parking

"A lot of money has been spent on upgrading town centres etc. They need to reduce rates there."

"Merthyr retail outlets are affecting RCT. Companies shouldn't be allowed to set up shop – big companies, regen and strategic projects go together."

"Business rates are too high in town centres "places closing down"

"Waste of time, businesses will never come back to the area"

"Town centres – the shops need improving, the appearance isn't good. Car parking can be expensive. You might be going to a cheap shop but you have to add car parking to your bill. Too many charity shops."

"People like to go to Supermarkets"

"Town centres – lower parking charges, free parking"

"All cosmetic didn't bring trade into the town. Need better shops"

"Some places put pictures up of a false shop front when a building is derelict. This needs to happen more to make it look pretty. This would encourage more shops."

"Out of town shopping is always going to win over small retails"

"Town centres – variety of types of shop"

Housing

- 6.14 A number of comments were received about grants and loans that the Council provides, including;

Appropriate sites (Brownfield sites)

"Why don't they put houses on sites such as Cefn Mabley rather than existing sites?"

"Seriously look at Brownfield sites to develop, look at vacant properties and for owners to develop them"

"Bring property back into use rather than new – Brownfield sites"

“Re-use land or derelict buildings, provide more social housing, enforce land laws on buildings that are falling apart, especially if it’s an eyesore. Would improve the community.”

Too many houses – not enough amenities

“Car parking is suffering at the number of houses / houses being built”

“Don’t take any more, too many houses going up in Talbot Green”

“Too many houses in Aberdare, not enough shops”

“People can’t get into the doctors and dentists as there are too many people living in the area and not enough amenities”

“If you’re going to build all these houses, you need to have enough amenities to go with it”

Not enough housing

“More low cost housing needed – landlords provide very uncertain housing for those lower paid families”

“Housing shortage so agree with any investment which will increase the amount of properties and make it easier for people to get on property ladder”

“More housing needed for regeneration – Council need infrastructure where planning”

“Bungalows for older people and social housing needed – so many adaptations in houses and it costs the Council money.”

“People with disabilities are having to move miles from family as there isn’t housing for them”

Homelessness

“Homelessness – money put into wrong programmes – should be spent on education such as cooking classes instead of food banks – rather put money into this.”

“Mental health and drug issues need to be addressed to help the homeless”

"Homelessness – there's a load of empty property in Maerdy and no-one wants to live there"

Assistance for first time buyers / information on grants

"More publication of grants for housing – people need more information, more transparency, more discussion groups"

"Granddaughter just bought a house + has accessed the grant"

"Sell houses to younger people at a lower rate when older people can't live in houses anymore (Council / housing association)"

"Assistance for first time buyers. Bring developers into area"

Standards of housing / buildings

"It's not only doing away with heritage (by not restoring buildings) it's doing away with really good buildings"

"Architecture in the Valleys – old School, public buildings – they need to actively conserve, re-store these buildings, do them up, not tear them down"

"It can be dangerous leaving buildings derelict – if it's housing, they need to be done up for people"

"Standards of housing inspections in social housing needs to be massively improved – Cynon Taf HA."

Strategic Projects

- 6.15 In relation to the investment in some of the Council's strategic projects the following comments were made;

Cross Valley link

"I would like the Council to replace some of the trees that they've ripped up doing the cross valley link"

"Cross Valley link good, difficult to cross main St"

"Pleased to see cross valley link finally happening, it started about 25 years ago"

"Cross valley link will benefit the area"

"Mountain Ash X valley link – well overdue, excellent strategic project"

Lido

"Lido – can afford £1"

"Lido brilliant, get people into town, needs to be open all year around, clubs would use TUP, believe it when I see it - white elephant!"

"Lido is a fantastic thing, I haven't used it but I will go"

"People would prefer to pay more for the lido and pay less for snacks / food in the shop at lido."

"More for children, Lido booking is ridiculous."

"The lido is brilliant, I've heard there's a new bridge going into the park, where the day centre was, that could have been a double storey car park."

Taff Vale Precinct

"Needs more shops in the Taff Vale Development"

"Taff Vale: would like to see more shops so could provide rates relief"

"Taff vale precinct – good for library, more modern"

"Important resource – leisure. Taff Vale precinct looks really good, offices should be in town centres, public transport – really important."

"Taff vale – offices not needed, more shops needed, need outlet shopping"

"Car parking should be available at the precinct"

Overall

"Anything to help regenerate access is good to see"

"If money is there then happy with it"

"Happy with A4119+ bypass proposals"

"Cycle path in Talbot Green is great, happy with proposals on A4119 + Llanharan"

"Really like the Talbot green cycle path, good idea"

"As long as it brings investment + jobs"

"Happy to invest if they are beneficial to people"

"Viability issues with strategic projects in Pontypridd"

"Will make no difference"

"Pontyclun park & ride, needs expansion"

"Will businesses come into the area? Needs investment."

"Have the community more involved, There needs to be more social activities, there' slots of activities"

"Railway from Hirwaun to Aberdare. Strategic projects like this are important, this would promote the economy. You wouldn't have to have masses of input to get this up and running"

Overall (All investment areas)

OPAG were happy to continue to invest in all of the above investment areas.

PART B Results – Key Areas

6.16 As previously stated, to support the delivery of the Corporate Plan in the context of funding reductions, increasing demand and rising cost pressures, the Council is focusing on five key areas to maximise resources and deliver improved services.

- **Digitalisation** – making services by creating an agile workforce and increasing opportunities for residents to interact with us online
- **Early Intervention and Prevention** – invest in services which allow us to solve issues before they escalate
- **Commercialisation** – offer some of our services on a commercial basis to lessen the impact of budget reductions
- **Efficiency** – continue to deliver millions of pounds worth of efficiencies each year – since 2012 we have saved over £30 million in this way
- **Independence** – invest in community based services which will support individuals and couples to remain independent

People were asked to discuss the themes at the various events, the following are a selection of comments received;

Digitalisation

Online services

- *“Bus passes – should be able to apply, download at home, people can’t get to places to get their bus passes as they haven’t got a bus pass”*
- *“Childcare”*
- *“Digital blue badge application?”*
- *“Special collections – can we pay online?”*
- *“Digitalisation – think this is a good idea, I think some things you go to a one4all centre for could be done online”*
- *“Ordering bin bags online, ordering library books etc.”*
- *“School dinners online are a good idea”*
- *“Do everything online – I use it for everything. Could we do a running balance of Council tax”*
- *“Better WiFi in town centres+ Council premises”*

Council Employees

- *“Digitalisation for staff is a good idea and could save more”*
- *“Hot desk good”*
- *“Support technology to enable staff to be mobile”*
- *“Web casting of Council meeting is needed – transparency.”*
- *“Agile working and hot desking”*
- *“More agile ways of working would be a good thing”*

Face to Face Services

- *“Digitalisation could be an issue for literacy skills. The more distance there is between people and services, the more problems they have”*
- *“Keep face to face”*
- *“This is a good thing as long as it’s not taken too far. I sometimes need to do things face to face with people.”*
- *“Don’t ever do away with face to face offices”*
- *“Like face to face communication”*
- *“All for progress – libraries important for people without computers. Don’t detract from this.”*
- *“Still need an element of face to face... impact on older people”*

People not online

- *“Ageing population – might end up isolating older people if they’re not online. Bear in mind elderly and those not online.”*
- *“People in RCT don’t all get ICT access – don’t need it”*
- *“Don’t agree hundreds of people haven’t got a computer, this is ageist”.*

Early Intervention and Prevention

“We’ve got to deliver things differently” (OPAG)

Positive

- *“Need early intervention & prevention”*
- *“Yes agree targeting money early saves in the long run”*
- *“Good idea to centralise things”*

Community Hubs

- *“Community Hub – agree but need to market properly”*
- *“Community hubs – need better consultation with services already being offered by other organisations.”*
- *“Good idea but why not use day centres”*
- *“Amalgamate everything into one place to make it easier for people, community centres could help health authority by having clinics etc all in one place”*
- *“Consider the buildings in the community, how would people get to the Hub? This could be done in the valleys small villages but consider carefully, Abercynon would be great, utilise library”*

- *“Community hubs would be a good idea as long as there’s transport. People need regular transport esp if the doctors surgery is in there”*
- *“Would be nice to have the libraries involved at the heart of it”*

Extra Care Homes

- *“Publicise more about what facilities are available for more mature residents. Extra care, sheltered accomm telecare.”*
- *“Extra care homes would be fabulous” (OPAG)*

Suggestions

- *“Domestic abuse, drug abuse, children, troubled families. Support should be literacy / numeracy education – catch kids early”*
- *“For older people library staff can help with issues”*
- *“Use with property maintenance renovation, early intervention + prevention”*
- *“Mental Health services investment – it has been cut, staff not being replaced, if not then the problems will get worse in the future.”*
- *“Slimming / diet classes – mental health provision – extra help needed, cooking / nutrition classes”*
- *“Services for the elderly, social services. Hospital & rehabilitation. Social services should be talking to the hospital.”*
- *“Being more proactive in tackling anti-social behaviour, using schools, community services and family education to prevent problem families / people”*
- *“What about schemes for younger people living with older people, getting paid and having somewhere to live. Older people get company too then.”*
- *“Better partnership working! If it worked, it could be a really good benefit you need to advertise Council Services better, marketing needs to be better.”*
- *“More parenting skills are necessary and should be encouraged”*
- *“More early intervention in schools”*

Commercialisation

Positive

- *“Good idea for investment”*
- *“Commercialisation and digitalisation go hand in hand”*
- *“This is important, put money into the Council, business support is essential”*

- *“Community would be more trusting of a service provided by the Council”*
- *“Commercialisation – totally agree with the council looking into this to raise further funds”*

Negative

- *“Too small in terms of income”*
- *“Not for MOT’s shouldn’t get involved in this leave it to others”*
- *“I’d rather see improvements in existing provision”*

Specific Examples

- *“MOT good idea as long as it’s re-invested”*
- *“Pest control – offer to businesses”*
- *“Gardening services is a massive issue for people across RCT”*
- *“Gardening services, electrical services & handyman jobs services, odd jobs”*
- *“Meeting rooms – charge to businesses / community orgs, space available for office space now – charge”*
- *“Tree surgery good, trust the Council”*
- *“Indoor play facilities for children – paid for hiring out skips – MOTs”*
- *“Gardening services! The Council could do people’s baskets & gardens etc”*
- *“Cleaning services, jet washing fronts of houses, paths, driveways”*
- *“Minibus fleet rent out buses from the Council – rent out for rugby match days etc”*
- *“Happy to pay for handyman decorators etc”*
- *“The Council could sell wood / tree trunks to people for their log burners”*
- *“Catering services for funerals, weddings”*

Financial

- *“Most of the people in this area are elderly and people haven’t got that much money. The Council would have to look at fair pricing strategies”*
- *“Providing a cheaper rate, competitive good idea, gardening services”*
- *“Depends on the price, if it is competitive”*

Efficiency

General

- *“Should already be doing this”*
- *“Ok – but need to protect jobs”*
- *“The Council should be better funded. It should not be in this situation”*
- *“Needs to be balanced with the quality of the service – can’t cut corners just to save money”*

Specific suggestions

- *“Staff – buy your own pens”*
- *“Look at solar panels on Council buildings. Lights – LED, All for efficiency, but don’t cut hours at leisure centres”*
- *“Libraries – each library has a different audience for books, but we still have to invest in other books that are never used. Reports on books that are needed, market for books for different areas”*
- *“Use existing skills more efficiently also working from home + being mobile”*

Streetcare & Waste services

- *“Collect less regularly (waste) fortnightly but could do 3 / 4 weeks”*
- *“Less waste refuse collections monthly”*
- *“Recycling waste contaminated bags, not saving money – needs more enforcement”*
- *“Collect all rubbish using only 1 lorry instead of 3 waste of money”*
- *“Fly tipping must add up to a lot, maybe scrap charges for white goods etc”*
- *“Could recycling come into it? Less bin collections?”*
- *“Invest in enforcement officers to tackle dog fouling which will cut down on cleaning for the council, fine people on the first instance”*

Independence

Positive

- *“Agree entirely with this, more facilities to help people to get out and about”*
- *“Want to be self maintained, not to put pressure on services”*
- *“Independence is great, good to invest”*
- *“Long run it will be cheaper for Council + they will be happier”*
- *“Good idea, but support services have to be there e.g. home care and different support level of workers.”*

Suggestions

- *“Over 50s club, places for people to go to, increases library open hours”*
- *“Independence – would like to see more supported accommodation units”*
- *“Should invest more to keep people in their own homes. Should bring back wardens to sheltered accommodation”*
- *“There should be more bungalows for older people / people with disabilities”*
- *“All encompassing service needed – not just feeding and dressing – need to make sure their home is taken care of too”*
- *“Everything that helps – Cafe 50, more like this in Pontyclun”*

Extra Care Homes

- *“Extra care facilities sound like a good idea”*
- *“Communal housing is the answer. Libraries & doctors can visit, people have company. People still have their independence.”*
- *“Happy with investment in this area – positive about extra care”*
- *“Home improvements – extra care is a good investment”*
- *“Makes sense, invest much more in community health + social services, more extra care”*

Council Tax

6.17 Residents were asked what level of Council Tax increase would be acceptable for the next financial year. The following table shows that at the face to face events 42% of people suggested a council tax increase of 0%, whilst 39% would be happy with a 3% increase or higher.

	No	%
0%	50	42
1%	22	18
3%	25	21
5%	16	13
Over 5%	6	5
		0
Total	119	100

Table 14 – Council Tax level of increase

A small number of comments were received on levels of Council Tax at the events, including;

Those in agreement with an increase in Council Tax

- *“Council tax raise acceptable if necessary”*
- *“Council tax – people want services but they won’t pay for them. It should be increased so you have the money!”*
- *“If services improve, 3% be able to do this”*
- *“As long as people think the money will be spent wisely, I don’t mind paying 5%”*
- *“If you are investing in this stuff, great – better school etc”*
- *“Happy to have a medium increase as long as money is re-invested”*
- *“5% as long as the money is spent well”*
- *“More transparency with Council spending. People would be quite” happy to spend 5% extra if they know where the money is going”*
- *“As long as I know where my money is going, I’m happy to pay 10%”*
- *“Council tax increases should be between 0&1%”*
- *“Council tax should go up in line with inflation. The rise should reflect what inflation is at the moment. Need to take into consideration the valleys pay.”*
- *“Council tax – no problem paying 5%+ if it maintains services”*

Those who disagree with an increase in Council Tax

- *“Council tax is unfair. If I die, my wife gets a 25% discount. We pay 10% of our income towards rates.”*
- *“Council tax is an issue”*
- *“Would prefer a reduction in Council tax”*
- *“Change the Council Tax for empty properties, work with owners of old / derelict buildings eg. church / chapels”*

6.18 All members of the OPAG group agreed that a 3% rise was acceptable.

Members agreed that there is a need to increase Council Tax to keep the services, and the amount was agreed at 3% (OPAG minutes)

“I don’t mind council tax going up, as long as you provide evidence of where this is going to reduce cuts to services”

7. YOUNG PERSON ENGAGEMENT EVENT

7.1 All comprehensive School Councils were invited to send up to 2 pupils from their school, along with representatives from the new youth forums, to take part in the first RCT County Wide Youth Forum event.

7.2 The following schools/youth Forums sent representatives;

- St Johns
- Rhydywaun
- Mountain Ash
- Cynon Forum
- Taf Forum
- Hawthorn
- Pontypridd High
- Garth Olwg
- Y Pant
- Llanhari
- Tonyrefail
- Rhondda Forum
- Treorchy
- Ferndale
- Tonypandy



- 7.3 The event included short presentations, an interactive key pad question and answer session and a facilitated group discussion on Council Investment. The Programme of the event was as follows;

Programme for the event:

- 4.15pm** Welcome and Introductions - Cllr Leyshon
- 4.20pm** Ice breaker – Stacey Oliver
- 4.35pm** Youth Parliament Update – Andrew Burrows and MYPs
- *MYM Results*
 - *Parliament Debate*
 - *YEPS Pledge to RCT Results*
- 4.55pm** County Youth Forum Consultation Update – Sarah Evans
- 5.10pm** RCT Budget Consultation – James Whitehurst
- *Video*
 - *Interactive consultation*
- 5.30pm** Mental Health Subgroup Feedback – Young Person
- *Update on on-going work and*
 - *Comments/Questions from the forum*
- 5.40pm** Anti Bullying Subgroup Feedback – Young Person
- *Update on on-going work and*
 - *Comments/Questions from the forum*
- 5.50pm** Feedback and Evaluations- Cllr. Leyshon
Confirmation of Chair/Secretary Ballot
Evaluation of CYF
Future Dates
- 6.00pm** Thank you and Close – Cllr. Leyshon

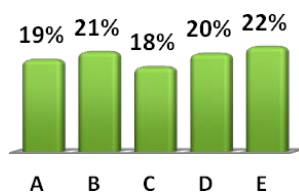
Feedback

- 7.4 The following section outlines some of the feedback received.

5 Key Areas

Rank these in order of 1-5 that you think are most important, 1 being the most important and 5 being the least important.

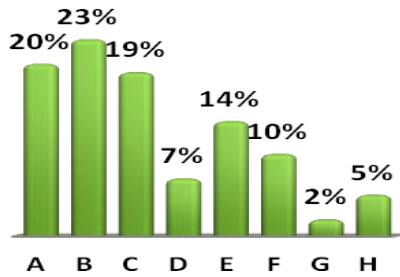
A	Digitalisation	200	19%
B	Early Intervention and Prevention	217	21%
C	Commercialisation	184	18%
D	Efficiency	213	20%
E	Independence	228	22%
		1042	100%



Investment Areas

Do you think the council should continue to invest in these areas?
Pick the four most important

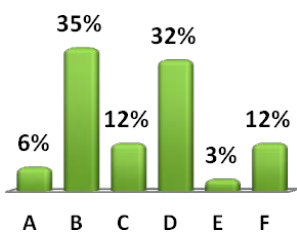
A	Improving School Facilities	21	20%
B	Money to tackle empty properties and homelessness	24	23%
C	Creating apprentice and graduate jobs	20	19%
D	Improving roads and pavements	7	7%
E	Regenerating town centres	14	14%
F	Leisure Centres and outdoor leisure facilities	10	10%
G	Play areas	2	2%
H	Big constructions projects	5	5%
		103	100%



Council Tax Year

What do you think should happen with next years council tax?

A	5% Increase	2	6%
B	3% Increase	12	35%
C	1% Increase	4	12%
D	No Change	11	32%
E	1% Decrease	1	3%
F	3% Decrease	4	12%
		34	100%



7.5 An engagement session was also held with young people at Treorchy Comprehensive School

Council Tax

- All agreed that the Council should maintain as many services at the current level as possible by increasing Council Tax to a preferred amount of 3% to contribute towards closing the budget gap.

Schools budget

- When asked whether the protection and increase of Schools budget (£1M) was reasonable, the general feel was that it was a good thing that the budget was protected, but it was also stated that an extra £1M wouldn't go far.

Comments included:

"Not reasonable"

"I don't think £1M would go far as lots of schools are developing quickly".

Fees and charges

- When it came to fees and charges, respondents were asked to state which areas they would want to protect from an increase in charge. All told us not to increase school meal charges.

The Council's Priorities

- All agreed with the Council's plan to improve services by creating an agile workforce and increasing opportunities for residents to interact with the Council online through Digitalisation, however there were concerns over cutting jobs, *"Careful of jobs"*, *"Protect jobs."*
- All agreed with the Council's plan to invest in services which allow the Council to solve issues before they escalate through Early Intervention & Prevention, *"Good idea."* They also found that this priority was similar and tied in with the Council's priority, Independence.
- Respondents also agreed that the Council should offer some services on a commercial basis to lessen the impact of budget reductions through Commercialisation, *"Good idea."*
- Again, when it came to efficiencies, all agreed with this Council priority and comments included, *"Bin collections should be done at different times."*
- Overall, everyone involved agreed that these were the right priorities and areas to focus on.

Council investment opportunities

The following are a selection of comments made around the Council's investment areas;

Education

"Schools should have days where they teach young people how they would make plans to buy a house / apply for a job, what taxes are etc."

"The school has a community Hub where they charge other schools."

"Further investment in the libraries."

"Ton library was so nice, the nearest now is Treorchy."

Youth services

"Cwmparc is a rough area, the young people that go to the youth club there are doing so much better. This should be an area that the Council should invest in – it could come under Early Intervention & Prevention."

"RCT should make a boys club out of closed down schools. Pupils with behavioural problems go to youth clubs etc, they are doing better."

Highways

"Ton Pentre – speed bumps that don't need to be there, there's no Primary school there – waste of money."

"Tonypany traffic lights by ASDA – people get stuck when too much traffic goes through and the lights go red."

"Treorchy by the Stag – the traffic lights are too busy, when they're working it's worse."

Transport

"Blaenrhondda – the public transport isn't good."

"School transport – Gelli & Pentre buses – The Council should invest in a few more buses for school transport. Public transport times affect pupils starting times and pupils are starting school late. If there were more school buses, this wouldn't be a problem."

Strategic projects

"The paddling pool – shame they're not opening anymore."

"The Lido is good – reasonable prices."

"They should bring back Ponty in the park event, bring more events in Rhondda, and bring in revenue through events."

Leisure

"Ystrad leisure centre is quite nice now."

Play areas

"Play areas are unsafe around here."

8. Social Media Feedback

8.1 The Council provided some questions, via a poll, for social media users on the Council’s Twitter and Facebook pages, providing an additional method for people to engage with the budget setting process.

8.2 The following results were received;

Budget Poll Results

Poll 1 - The Council is investing in a range of areas through #RCTinvest, which area is the most important to you?

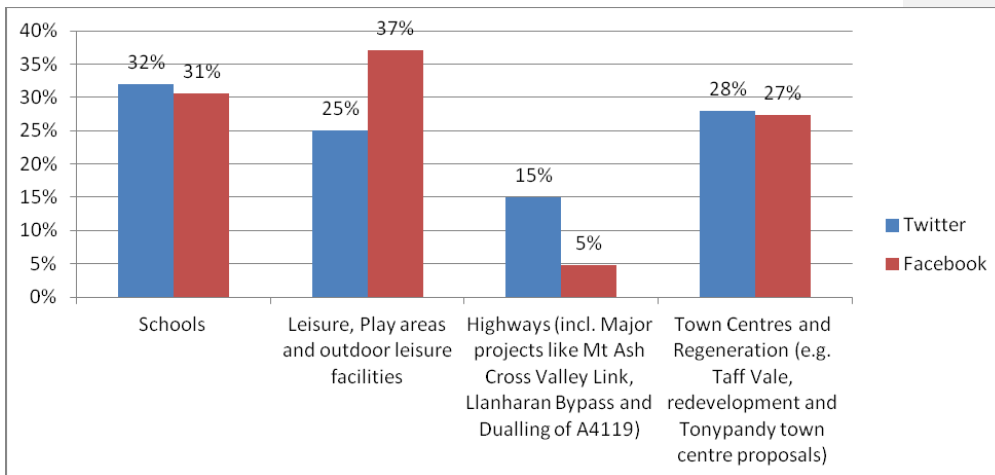


Figure 8 – Areas of importance for investment

Poll 2

To ensure the Council can continue to maintain and improve services in the face of continued cuts to public sector funding we are focusing on the following areas:

- Early Intervention and Prevention
- Digitalisation
- Promoting Independence
- Efficiency
- Commercialisation

Do you agree with this approach to protect, maintain and improve services?

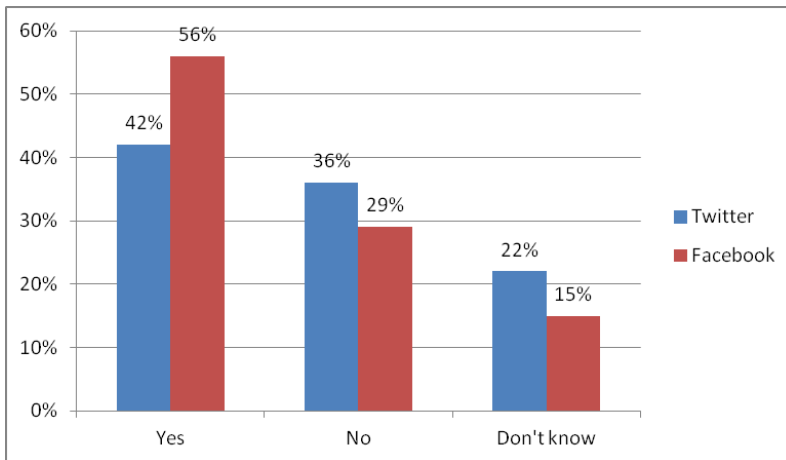


Figure 9 – Agreement of Council focus on 5 key areas

Poll 3

The Council is proposing to protect its schools and education budget with an additional £1m each year for the next 5 years. Do you agree with this approach?

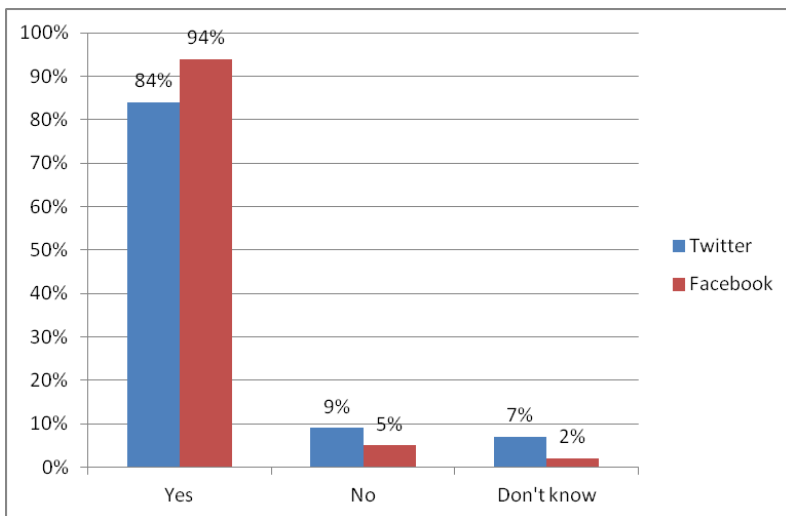


Figure 10 – Agreement with proposal to protect school budget

NOTE: This report presents a summary of all of the views received during the consultation process. At a later date all of the detailed comments will be supplied to relevant service managers to inform policy and decision making over the coming year.

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL
FINANCE AND PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting of the Finance and Performance Scrutiny Committee held at the County Borough Council Offices, The Pavilions, Cambrian Park, Clydach Vale on Monday, 18th December, 2017 at 5 p.m.

PRESENT

County Borough Councillor M.J.Powell – in the Chair

County Borough Councillors

J.Cullwick
G.R.Davies
J.Elliott
G.Holmes
C.J.Willis
R.Yeo

Non Committee Members in Attendance

County Borough Councillor L.M.Adams – Chair of Overview & Scrutiny Committee
Mr.R.Hull – Chair and Lay Member of the Audit Committee
County Borough Councillor M.A.Norris – Cabinet Member for Corporate Services

Officers in Attendance

Mr.C.B.Jones – Director, Legal & Democratic Services
Mr.P.Mee – Director, Public Health, Protection & Community Services
Mr.B.Davies – Director of Financial Services
Mr.P.Griffiths – Service Director, Performance & Improvement
Ms.M.Warburton – HR Advisor, Equality & Diversity Team
Ms.K.May – Head of Democratic Services

20 **CHAIR**

The former Chair of the Committee, County Borough Councillor G.R.Davies, congratulated County Borough Councillor M.J.Powell on taking up his new role as Chair of the Finance & Performance Scrutiny Committee, following the decision made at the Council meeting held on the 29th November, 2017.

21 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from County Borough Councillors S.Bradwick, W.Lewis, S.Rees-Owen and T.Williams.

22 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

RESOLVED – to note that in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct there were no personal declarations made at the meeting pertaining to the agenda.

23 MINUTES

RESOLVED – to approve as an accurate record the minutes of the meeting of the Finance & Performance Scrutiny Committee held on the 23rd October, 2017.

24 MATTERS ARISING

Following the meeting of this Committee held on the 23rd October 2017, and prior to today's meeting, Members had been provided with responses to the points raised under Agenda Items 'Council Performance Report (Quarter 1) and 'Review of 2017/18 Performance Indicator Targets'. The feedback covered the following areas:

- Clarity on the reasons for the below target performance in respect of Measure 21 SSOF21 - 'The average length of time older people (aged 65 or over) are supported in residential care homes (days)'.
- 2016/17 sickness absence information for other local authorities in Wales to enable the Council's performance to be considered in the context of the national picture.
- Further information on the range of services in place to support children and their families in the context of below target performance in quarter 1 for the performance indicator '% of children and young people requiring intervention from statutory services'.
- Further information on the 2017/18 target set for the 'Number of library visits per 1,000 population' in the context of a reduction in opening hours was likely to be an influencing factor for the lower target (i.e. 2016/17 actual performance of 3,950 and 2017/18 target of 3,285) and in addition, what action was the Council taking to pick up those residents who are not anticipated to visit libraries and was there any correlation with footfall in town centres?

In addition, the Service Director, Performance & Improvement informed the Committee that:

- Members will shortly be furnished with the appropriate electronic devices to assist them in carrying out their role as Members of this Committee more effectively, for example, by enabling more interactive review of scrutiny papers using the electronic links included in reports to more

detailed information. The Service Director added that the relevant support and training will also be provided.

- In response to the query raised by a Member at the meeting of this Committee held on the 23rd October 2017 in respect of formulating a new performance indicator around dog fouling, the Service Director, Performance & Improvement provided feedback from the Director, Streetcare & Highways in that it would be difficult to formulate an all encompassing and meaningful indicator for this area. As an alternative, the Director of Streetcare & Highways confirmed that he would attend meetings of this Committee on a periodic basis to update Members on the progress made with the Public Spaces Protection Order that came into force on the 1st October, 2017.

25 PRESENTATION – REVENUE BUDGET CONSULTATION

The Director of Financial Services provided Members with a presentation in respect of the 2018/19 Revenue Budget Strategy Consultation and up dated the Committee under the following headings:

- General Approach for 2018/19
- Provisional Local Government Settlement – Headlines
- Implications for Rhondda Cynon Taf
- Consultation
 - Budget
 - Simulator
 - Corporate Plan
 - Council Tax Reduction Scheme
- Budget Setting Timetable

Following the up date, the Director of Financial Services indicated that the overview intended to assist Members in formulating their responses to a number of questions to be posed to the Committee in its role as a consultee as part of the 2018/19 Revenue Budget Strategy Consultation process.

The Director of Financial Services sought feedback from the Committee on a number of areas and the views of elected Members are noted below.

With regard to the question around should the Council ‘maintain as many services at the current level as possible even if it meant a reasonable increase in Council Tax to contribute towards closing the budget gap or cutting services to keep any increase in Council Tax to a minimum’, Members fed back the need to balance the protection of frontline services alongside meeting the needs of the public.

In terms of the question around 'what would be your preferred level of Council Tax increase for next year' (i.e. 0%, 1%, 3%, 5% or over 5%), the views expressed by some Members were:

- It should not go up by more than 3%; and
- There needs to be the identification of further efficiency savings to limit the increase in Council Tax.

In addition for this area, Members discussed the possibility of varying the level of council tax for different areas within the County Borough. The Director of Financial Services provided confirmation to Members that there is no statutory basis for this in that there is a legal requirement to have a single level of council tax each year that applies to all community areas of a local authority (excluding variations as a result of areas with Community Councils). The Director informed Members that the Council Tax Base report 2018/19 is to be reported to Cabinet on 19th December 2017.

In respect of the question around the proposal to 'protect school budgets and increase it by £1M overall compared to an overall decrease in funding the Council has received of -0.2%', Member feedback was:

- This is considered to be reasonable treatment; and
- Whilst the proposed increase is welcomed, a £1M increase in the context of the total budget for schools will still not fully meet their budget requirement.

With regard to the question relating to fees and charges, some members fed back that:

- School meal prices should not be increased;
- There should be an opportunity to increase fees and charges for Leisure Services based on users, generally, being able to afford to pay more;
- There should be a consultation process with sports clubs before any changes to fees and charges are considered there; and
- There should be no or only very small increases for homecare.

In addition, Members noted that it would be helpful to have sight of all fees and charges made by the Council. The Director of Financial Services confirmed that a full schedule of all Council Fees and Charges is published on the Council's website and this would be forwarded through to Members.

In terms of the question around should the Council focus on the areas of Digitalisation, Early Intervention and Prevention, Commercialisation, Efficiency and Independence to support the delivery of Corporate Plan priorities, Members expressed the need to receive further information on these areas to enable informed views to be provided. The Director of Financial Services indicated that progress up dates on the Council's Corporate Plan priorities are

produced on a quarterly basis for review / approval by Cabinet and thereafter the Finance and Performance Scrutiny Committee, and up dates on the five areas of focus will be reported to Members as and when appropriate proposals are drafted.

In relation to the question on investment priorities, Members fed back that:

- The impact of investment in highways, regeneration and leisure facilities is visible and positive; and
- Further investment is needed in the Rhondda area on highways infrastructure and town centre regeneration to attract more people to shop in the local area.

With specific regard to the questions around the Council Tax Reduction Scheme, the following responses were fed back by Members:

- ‘Do you think that 4 weeks is a reasonable period to continue paying Council Tax Reduction when someone returns to work?’
 - Yes, this is a good system; and
 - Yes, would support the continuation of this approach.
- ‘Do you think that it is reasonable for the Council to continue to totally exclude War Disablement and War Widow’s Pensions income when assessing entitlement to the Council Tax Reduction scheme?’
 - Yes, these elements should continue to be excluded.
- ‘Do you think that 3 months is a reasonable period to backdate claims for working age and pensioner claimants?’
 - Would support the back dating of claims being increased to 6 months.

RESOLVED – that the views of Members as outlined above be fed into the budget consultation process.

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC HEALTH, PROTECTION & COMMUNITY SERVICES

26 BEREAVEMENT FEES AND CHARGES FOR WAR VETERANS AND SERVICE MEN AND WOMEN – NOTICE OF MOTION

Pursuant to Minute No.17 of the meeting of this Committee held on the 23rd October, 2017, the Director, Public Health, Protection & Community Services set out in his report, a list of the agencies that had been approached and invited to comment on the Council's proposals together with details of the draft policy.

Following a lengthy discussion, it was **RESOLVED** –

1. That the following amendments be made to the draft policy:-

Under the heading `Eligibility`

- the first bullet point to read as follows:-

“Any veteran, resident in Rhondda Cynon Taf that has served with the Armed Forces (including National Service) for the minimum length of service required”.

- No amendments to be made to the second bullet point.

- Paragraph 4.3 to read as follows:-

“For the purposes of this policy “active service” will mean any service personnel that have been deployed”.

2. Members agreed that the Council should apply a reduction of 25% in the total costs of all bereavement services provided as outlined in paragraph 4.6 of the report.
3. That the policy be applied as a pilot and reviewed after 12 months.
4. That the Director, Public Health, Protection & Community Services report the recommendations of this Committee, as outlined in 1 - 3 above, to the Cabinet as part of the wider considerations around fees and charges.

27 COUNCIL PERFORMANCE REPORT – 30TH SEPTEMBER 2017 (QUARTER 2)

The Director of Financial Services provided Members with an overview of the Council's performance both from a financial and operational perspective,

based on the first six months of the financial year i.e. to the 30th September, 2017.

The Chair of the Health & Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee informed Members that at the meeting of this Committee held on the 13th December 2017, a presentation was received on Delayed Transfers of Care setting out that there are now hospital based Social Workers as well as hospital Discharge Co-ordinators in place. The Member indicated that he was pleased to note that an improved 2017/18 target had been set for the rate of delayed transfer of care for social care reasons compared to the 2016/17 performance level (i.e. 4.5 compared to 4.95) and that performance at 30th September 2017 was better than the target set. The Member also indicated that a working group is being established as part of the Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee to undertake a review of Elderly Mentally Infirm nursing beds within Rhondda Cynon Taf with the aim of supporting further improvement in this area.

A question was raised in respect of the progress being made around the roll out of agile working. The Director of Financial Services indicated that the roll out is part of a wider programme of work over the medium term to provide officers with a range of technology to help to further improve service delivery and efficiency, for example, care assessments undertaken electronically in clients homes and the results automatically fed into the central system for more timely action and the roll out of video conferencing and on-line document sharing to reduce travel time / costs. The Director added that the programme will be accompanied by support for officers to help them take maximum advantage of the range of technology and will also complement the Council's work to provide customers with further opportunities to interact digitally with the Council.

A Member requested whether more contextual information could be included within future reports against relevant performance indicator results, for example, inclusion of the number of clients for the performance indicator ‘% of adults who completed a period of reablement and have no package of care and support 6 months later’. The Service Director – Performance and Improvement confirmed that contextual information would be included in future reports for specific performance indicators.

Following consideration of the report, it was **RESOLVED** – to note the Council's financial and operational performance position as at the 30th September, 2017 (Quarter 2).

M.POWELL

CHAIR

The meeting closed at 7.35 p.m.

**SCHOOLS BUDGET FORUM
 WEDNESDAY 22nd NOVEMBER 2017
 BLOCK F, CLYDACH VALE**

MINUTES

<p>PRESENT:</p>	<p>Councillor J Rosser (Chair) Councillor C Leyshon Councillor G Hopkins Councillor M Norris Rhian Ellis – YGG Cymmer Rhys Jones – Treorchy Comprehensive Paul Morgan – (Cwmaman Infants & Glynhafod Juniors) Rhian Rees – Pontrhondda Primary Lisa Bailey – Tonysguboriau Primary David Davies – YGG Aberdar) David Jenkins – Ysgol Ty Coch Gemma Powell - Caradog Primary Rhys Angell Jones (Treorchy Comprehensive School) Beverly Cheetham – Y Pant Comprehensive</p>
<p>IN ATTENDANCE:</p>	<p>Clare Jones (NASUWT Representative) Mark Cleverley (NASUWT Representative) Craig Flynn (Central South Consortium) Barrie Davies (Director, Finance) Esther Thomas (Director of Education & Lifelong Learning) Catrin Edwards (Head of Service Transformation) Stephanie Davies (Head of Finance, Education and Financial Reporting) Martyn Silezin (14-19 Strategy Officer) Liz Randall (Principal Accountant, LMS) Alyson Winter (Central South Consortium Senior Grants Officer) Emma Wilkins (Executive & Regulatory Business Unit)</p>
<p>APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE:</p>	<p>Councillor A Morgan Councillor M Webber Chris Bradshaw (Chief Executive) Denise Gibbins (RCTGA) Marie Claire Hopkin (Park Lane Special School) Marc Jones (Ysgol Gyfun Rhydywaun) Simon Phillips -Llwynocrwn Primary Mark Thomas – Acting HT of Tonyrefail Community School</p>



No.	Discussion/Action	Action	By who
12.	<p>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST</p> <p>In accordance with the Council's Code of Conduct, there were no declarations of interest made pertaining to the agenda.</p>		
13.	<p>WELCOME AND APOLOGIES</p> <p>The Chair took the opportunity to welcome attendees and apologies for absence from Forum attendees were received.</p>		
14.	<p>MINUTES & MATTERS ARISING</p> <p>The minutes of the meeting held on 12th July, 2017 were received and agreed as an accurate record.</p>	Approved	Forum
15.	<p>2018/19 REVENUE BUDGET STRATEGY CONSULTATION</p> <p>The School Budget Forum received a presentation (attached) from the Director of Finance, advising of the Council's 2018/19 Revenue Budget Strategy Consultation. The presentation included information in respect of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provisional Local Government Settlement – Headlines • Implications for RCT • Consultation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Budget Simulator ➤ Corporate Plan ➤ CTRS • Budget Setting Timetable <p>The Director advised that following details of the provisional settlement and after applying the £6M efficiency target in full, the remaining budget gap for RCT totals £3.834M. Following the update the Director proceeded to consult the Forum on the Budget strategy with the questions outlined below.</p> <p>Q1 With a £3.8M budget gap, should the Council</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Maintain as many services as possible with a possible (reasonable) increase to 	Noted	Forum



	<p>the Council Tax? or</p> <p>b) Cut services to keep any Council Tax rise to a minimum?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Services already cut to a minimum, unrealistic to cut services further.• Surprised as to how little funding actually comes from Council Tax Revenue.• How many more cuts can realistically be made before services stop functioning?• When do efficiency savings actually become 'cuts'? <p>Q2. What would be your preferred level of Council Tax increase for next year?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 3% rise seems reasonable.• Need to make sure we're not targeting JAM (just about managing) residents of RCT. <p>Q3. Is the £1M increase reasonable for schools?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Not a reasonable amount when schools are expected to make continual improvement year on year with performance.• Schools budget subject to NI, Superannuation resulting in cuts and potential redundancy to staff – how can schools continue to improve without staff to teach?• Still a protection compared to the cuts being witnessed across other Council services.• Comparison to school funding by other Local Authorities– Officers advised of the need to look on a like by like basis for such comparisons.• Why is there a specified amount rather than a percentage figure? – Political Manifesto commitment by the Labour party before the settlement provision was announced.• Need to maintain current school balance reserves for future investment into the school – i.e. new technology. (Officers advised of the reduction in the reserves going forward.)• As Head Teachers we are held to account for standards in school in		
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	<p>respect of performance, attendance and behaviour – need resources to make such improvements.</p> <p>Q4. Fees & Charges - Which areas would you would want to protect from an increase in charge? (School Meals, Summer & Winter Playing Fees, Leisure Centre Memberships).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• If School Meals increase then potential that some children would go without a hot meal – concerns for Child welfare and potential revenue cuts in catering services.• Increase in School Meals can have a big impact on family budgets as often more than one child needs to be catered for within the school (i.e. siblings).• Breakfast Club funded straight from WG, would prefer to provide hot lunch time meal than a breakfast (breakfast is a cheaper meal to provide), as often Breakfast Club is utilised more for childcare than for the breakfast provision provided. <p>5. Do you think the Council Priorities identified are the correct focus?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Early Intervention & Prevention is crucial –The forum was advised that early intervention was now being looked at on a family basis rather than the child alone. The Director, Education & Lifelong Learning commented on the need to configure services differently to achieve positive benefits in this area.• Online payments – Positive outcomes for one secondary school and request for this to be rolled out further.• Commercialisation – Members were advised of a grant funded project for Business Managers to work in clusters to achieve economies of scale. <p>6. Council Investment Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Positive feedback in respect of the 19 Education projects identified.• 3G pitches within Communities good to see.		
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Should continue with such investment as a lot of difference can be made to Communities through such investment. <p>7A. Council Tax Reduction Scheme – 4 week period reasonable for return to work.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Yes, should be given all the support they can. Those residents on the borderline are the ones that struggle. <p>7B Council Tax Reduction Scheme – Exclude war disablement and war widow pension when assessing CTR scheme?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Yes, reasonable approach <p>7C Council Tax Reduction Scheme – Back dating claims by 3 months.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Yes, reasonable approach. 		
16.	<p>Central South Consortium - Grants 2017/18 & 2018/19</p> <p>The Senior Accountant for CSC provided the forum with a powerpoint presentation (as attached), detailing the grants going forward. The forum were advised in respect of the</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Education Improvement Grant - Indicative allocations show a cut of 11% in 2018/2019 and a further 10% in 2019/2020 Delegate as much of the EIG as possible to schools Allocate EIG using current PLASC data and provide schools with an indicative allocation (prior to the data being verified) in March 2018 with final allocations confirmed to schools in June/July Protection mechanism has been imposed to dampen 'huge swings' in funding 2017/18 – No school would lose more than a maximum of 32% but some schools could gain up to a max of 15% 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Noted Presentation to be emailed out 	<p>Forum</p> <p>EW</p>



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protection mechanism to cease in March 2018 <p>Members queried if the Minority Ethnic Achievement Grant would be delegated to schools and the Director, Education & Lifelong Learning confirmed that this was to be held centrally.</p> <p>Members queried the cost for ELSA training and were advised that the cost for this would be covered centrally and were further advised that schools would be reimbursed if training in this area had already been sought.</p> <p>Members of the Forum AGREED:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To note the content of the presentation 		
<p>17.</p>	<p>Post 16 Funding</p> <p>The Head of Transformation and the 14-19 Strategy Officer provided the forum with information in relation to Post 16 Funding.</p> <p>Members were made aware of the significant drop in pupil numbers and the resulting effect this would have in respect of post 16 funding. The officers proposed to Forum Members that a funding floor be applied, so that it wouldn't drop more than 30%. The officers advised that with Members consent this would be proposed and consulted upon with secondary Head Teachers at a meeting on the 23rd November. To assist Members further, the officers provided an anonymised table of data illustrating the information.</p> <p>Members queried the rationale behind the drop in figures and officers advised that 19% fewer pupils returned to 6th Form than expected. The officers advised that with some schools it was recognised that this was just a 'blip' although with others it was potentially a downward trend.</p> <p>Following discussions Members AGREED:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Noted • Consultation with Secondary HT to be taken forward 	<p>Forum CE / MS</p>



	<ul style="list-style-type: none">In principle that a 30% funding floor should be applied and that Secondary Head Teachers should be consulted upon with this proposal.		
18.	DATE OF NEXT MEETING The Chair advised that the next meeting of the School Budget Forum would take place on Wednesday 17 th January, 2018 providing no changes were made.	Noted	Forum

The meeting closed at **15:45pm**.

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL
FINANCE AND PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting of the Finance and Performance Scrutiny Committee held at the County Borough Council Offices, The Pavilions, Cambrian Park, Clydach Vale on Monday, 29th January, 2018 at 5 p.m.

PRESENT

County Borough Councillor M.J.Powell – in the Chair

County Borough Councillors

S.Bradwick	S.Rees-Owen
G.R.Davies	T.Williams
J.Elliott	C.J.Willis
G.Holmes	R.Yeo
W.Lewis	

Non Committee Members in Attendance

County Borough Councillor L.M.Adams – Chair of Overview & Scrutiny Committee
Mr.R.Hull – Chair and Lay member of the Audit Committee

Officers in Attendance

Mr.C.Lee – Group Director, Corporate & Frontline Services
Mr.B.Davies – Director, Financial Services
Mrs S Davies – Head of Finance
Mr.C.G.Jones – Director, Legal & Democratic Services
Ms.K.May – Head of Democratic Services

28 WELCOME

The Chair welcomed Ms K.Simmons, Performance Auditor of the Wales Audit Office, to the meeting.

29 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from County Borough Councillors S.Belzak (ex officio Member) and J.Cullwick.

30 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

RESOLVED – to note that in accordance with the Members Code of Conduct there were no personal declarations made at the meeting pertaining to the agenda.

Extract from Minutes

33 THE COUNCIL'S DRAFT 2018/19 REVENUE BUDGET STRATEGY PRE-SCRUTINY

The Group Director, Corporate & Frontline Services provided Members with a presentation in respect of the Council's Draft 2018/19 Revenue Budget Strategy which contained the views of the Council's Senior Leadership Team under the following headings:-

- Council's Current Financial Position
- The 2018/19 Final Local Government Settlement
- The Starting Point Budget Gap
- Budget Consultation Outcomes
- Key Building Blocks
 - Council Tax
 - Schools
- The Final Budget Gap and Strategy Options
- Conclusion and Next Steps

Following the observations made, the Group Director, Corporate & Frontline Services indicated that the overview provided was to assist Members in formulating their views on the draft proposals especially with regard to:

- Council Tax levels
- A proposed schools increase
- Fees & Charges
 - Level of increase
 - Any exceptions/variations
- Strategy options to close remaining budget gap

A Member raised a query in relation to the decision that was made at the last Council Meeting held on the 17th January, 2017 in relation to the new level of Council Tax 0% discount for all Class C properties in RCT i.e. those properties which have been empty for longer than six months, effective from 1st April, 2018; which it was estimated would result in an increase of £1.5M.

In response the Group Director stated that the £1.5M is a one off additional resource which would be set aside and added to the funding available through the Council's Empty Property Grant Scheme.

In response to a further query raised at the meeting, the Group Director explained the process in respect of transitional funding which allows the Council to move away from the annual budget setting process and supports the council in smoothing the impact of part year savings and costs of future years. He also indicated that through savings achieved in year, the level of transitional funding was being replenished on a regular basis.

Members were happy with the proposed Council Tax level and queried the levels that had been proposed by other local authorities in Wales, when it was indicated by the Group Director that like this Authority, other Welsh Authorities were still at the consultation phase and therefore it would be difficult to make assumptions until such time as the Council Tax levels are publicly ratified.

The Committee also welcomed the schools increase as most Members were on the Governing Bodies of schools within their respective areas, who were also facing challenging times in meeting the budget gaps.

Members were also pleased to see that Community and Adults care had been protected.

One Member wished to place on record that within the public consultation report (page 74) under the heading `Highways` that the speed bumps referred to at Ton Pentre were not funded by the Council but were funded from the windfarm that had been installed at Blaenavon.

Following a discussion, the Group Director, Corporate & Frontline Services stated that the views of Members of this Committee would be fed back to the Cabinet at its meeting in February which would be incorporated into a report that would be presented to full Council on the 28th February, 2018.