



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

MUNICIPAL YEAR 2019-2020

**FINANCE & PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE**

26th September 2019

**REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR FOR
DEMOCRATIC SERVICES AND
COMMUNICATION –
CHRISTIAN HANAGAN**

Agenda Item No 6

**Engagement on the Council's
Budget 2020/21**

Author: Chris Davies (Consultation Manager)

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 The purpose of the report is to inform Committee of the proposed approach to resident engagement and consultation in respect of the 2020/21 budget and updated Corporate Plan 2020-2025.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Committee:

- 2.1 Consider the success achieved through last year's approach to the budget consultation, with our ongoing commitment to face to face engagement and increased use of our online tools.
- 2.2 Support the budget consultation process taking place during the autumn 2019, with the dates to be confirmed following clarification of the likely Welsh Government budget settlement timescales.
- 2.3 Consider the intention for the budget consultation to run alongside and complement a consultation on the Corporate Plan, linking in where appropriate

to avoid duplication, for example the events and forums will seek views on the budget as well as the corporate plan priorities.

- 2.4 Support the Council's statutory requirements regarding consultation on the Council Tax Reduction Scheme and Council Tax levels will be met via the proposed approach.
- 2.5 To request that the Service Director Democratic Services & Communications, reports the comments and observations of the committee to the Council's Cabinet when agreeing the engagement activities of the Council to support the development of the budget strategy for 2020/21.

3.0 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 In previous years the Council has undertaken a comprehensive approach to its annual budget consultation, involving a large number of residents and key stakeholders.
- 3.2 The approach has developed to include a wide range of face to face events in the community across the County Borough, as well as the development of an online budget simulator which gives residents and service users the opportunity to set the budget themselves and engage in a more interactive way.
- 3.3 The number of people we have engaged with has increased as the methods of engagement have developed. The approach has seen the number of people involved in the process rise from 144 in 2016/17 to 1,560 for the 2018/19 budget setting process to over 4,000 people in last year's 2019/20 consultation.
- 3.4 The widespread approach we use and the range of views we capture provides senior managers and Cabinet with the necessary information they need to set the budget for the year ahead. In addition, we have found that the vast amount of information we collect can also be valuable for service managers to use for their service planning and development.
- 3.5 It is therefore proposed that the approach outlined in section 4 below is utilised for the 2020/21 budget consultation process.

4.0 PROPOSED APPROACH

- 4.1 The 2020/21 budget consultation will include:
- 4.2 The use of an online budget simulator providing information on the services the Council provides and the potential consequences of increasing or reducing funding to services to set a legally balanced budget.
- 4.3 The use of social media to provide information to residents and service users and encourage engagement and feedback regarding the Council's budget and investment areas.

- 4.4 An online survey to collect responses on Council investments, Corporate Plan priorities, Council Tax levels and the Council Tax Reduction scheme.
- 4.5 Face to Face town centre, library, community hub and leisure centre roadshows. A number of these community drop in events will give residents the opportunity to engage with and speak to Cabinet Members and senior officers regarding the Council's budget and investment priorities.
- 4.6 Engagement with young people via Rhondda Cynon Taf's county wide youth forum.
- 4.7 Engagement with older people via the Older Persons Advisory Group.
- 4.8 A presentation and collection of views at the Disability Forum.
- 4.9 Consultation with the Finance and Performance Scrutiny Committee and the School Budget Forum.
- 4.10 The proposed time-table will be considered by Cabinet, taking account of the Welsh Government Local Government Settlement time-line, to be confirmed in due course and the reporting requirements of the Council.
- 4.11 Members will be aware that the Council's Senior Leadership make recommendations to the Council's Cabinet in respect of a budget strategy. The opportunity is also provided for this committee to pre-scrutinise the proposed strategy in advance of Cabinet considerations. The proposals of Cabinet, which would include a proposed level of Council Tax, are then reported for agreement by all members at Full Council.
- 4.12 All members have already received the opportunity at Cabinet and through Full Council to engage in the ongoing work on the Council's Medium Term Financial Planning.

Council Tax Reduction Scheme

- 4.13 The proposed approach will ensure the Council's duty to consult regarding Council Tax and the Council Tax Reduction Scheme are met as well as providing residents and service users with the opportunity to feedback on the Council's investment priorities.

Corporate Plan Engagement

- 4.14 The Budget consultation will run alongside the corporate plan engagement. The Council launched its first Corporate Plan 'The Way Ahead' in 2016. We are now in a position where we need to consider 2020 onwards and a new Corporate Plan
- 4.15 Views will be captured via a new website that will provide detail of the proposed priorities and a set of key commitments that will provide a framework for the

Council to follow. In addition we will be linking the approach to the budget consultation and asking for views on the priorities at all the budget engagement events and Forum meetings, as well as including a number of questions in our online budget survey.

5.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Opportunities to get involved in the budget consultation will be provided via a range of methods including online, at accessible roadshow events and specific engagement for young people and older people. The consultation will also involve the Council's Disability Forum.
- 5.2 The online budget simulator is accessible on mobile phones and tablet devices and residents without internet access or smart phone/tablet devices can visit a local library to access the online budget simulator or request a hard copy of the budget consultation questionnaire.

6.0 CONSULTATION / INVOLVEMENT

- 6.1 The recommendations outlined in the report seek to ensure a range of engagement opportunities are provided to residents and service users as part of the budget consultation process

7.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)

- 7.1 There are no financial implications directly aligned to this report.

8.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED

- 8.1 The Council has a statutory duty to consult on Council Tax and the Council Tax Reduction Scheme which will be met under the revised approach to the budget consultation outlined.

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

- 9.1 The budget setting process clearly impacts on the delivery of all Council services which contribute in turn to the delivery of the Council's Corporate Plan priorities.
- 9.2 As discussed above, the consultation on the new Corporate Plan will run alongside the budget consultation and provide views that will be taken into account as part of developing a new Corporate Plan that will be introduced from 2020 onwards.

10.0 CONCLUSION

- 10.1 The comprehensive approach undertaken in the last few years has led to increased engagement in the budget setting process through a more interactive and varied approach.
 - 10.2 The proposed approach for the 2020/21 budget consultation seeks to continue the positive approach, by ensuring that all residents and service users have every opportunity to provide feedback on these important issues including the updated Corporate Plan via a wide range of methods.
 - 10.3 The results of the consultation will be presented to senior officers and Cabinet Members early in the new year for their deliberations.
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