



Budget Consultation 2020/21 (Phase 1)

*Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough
Council*

January 2020



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- This section provides a summary of the main findings from the Phase 1 Budget Consultation 2020/21.
- The consultation was conducted in-house. The consultation period ran from the 21st November and ended on the 16th December 2019.
- The following methods were used to consult with stakeholders;
 - An online questionnaire
 - A number of Town Centre, Leisure Centre and Library events
 - Promotion through Social media
 - Questions/polls on social media
 - Youth Forum
 - Older Persons Advisory Group Meeting
 - Disability Forum Meeting
 - Finance & Performance Scrutiny Committee
 - Promotion with the Citizen's Panel
 - An email sent to key stakeholders, including Community and Town Councils, Trade Unions, Councillors, Local AM's and MPs
- The results of the budget questionnaire (305 responses) showed that the majority of respondents felt that the Council should protect services at their current level, through a 3% increase in Council Tax (80.8%).
- The majority of respondents (60.9%) would prefer a 3% increase in Council Tax (the current proposed level), with 24.2% stating less than 3% and 11.1% suggesting more than a 3% increase.
- 78% of respondents agreed that the Council should provide sufficient resources to fully cover increased pay costs in our schools.
- Respondents were asked to state which services they would want to protect from an increase in fees and charges in 2020/21, based on the assumption that they would be increased by 1.5% (i.e. the Consumer Price Index (CPI)). The majority of respondents felt that the fees and charges for the following services should be frozen (no increase);
 - Meals on Wheels (53.9%);
 - Bereavement Fees (53.5%);
 - School Meals (53.2%); and
 - Adult Social Care Charges (51.2%).

Those services where the majority of respondents suggested an increase of 1.5% (CPI level) were;

- Leisure Centre Pay and Play (55.4%);
- Leisure Centre Membership (53.9%); and
- Cinema (entrance fee) (51.9%).

- Respondents were provided with a list of Council services and asked to choose which services should be protected and prioritised for any additional resources in 2020/21. Respondents fed back that the majority of services listed be prioritised and protected with the exception of;
 - Music Service (63.5% do not protect); and
 - Cultural, Tourism and Heritage Services (57.7% do not protect).
- The top 5 services that respondents wanted to protect and prioritise were;
 - Children's Social Care Services (93.8%);
 - Schools (90%);
 - Adult Social Care Services (86.9%);
 - Highways, Transport and Street Care Services (81.9%); and
 - Waste and Recycling Services (78.1%).
- Respondents were provided with the following statement and asked whether they thought this was a good strategy.

Each year in balancing our budget and ensuring the effective use of resources, all our service managers are required to contribute toward a council-wide efficiency (savings) target of £6M. This means that all of our services are becoming more efficient, without impacting on front line services.

The majority of respondents thought that this was a good strategy (90.6%) and 91.8% said that we should continue to expect our managers to deliver more efficient services.

- Respondents were asked if they thought the Council should focus on a number of key areas. The majority of respondents agreed with all of the key areas, with the highest response being for Early Intervention and Prevention (88.9%).

	Yes (%)	No (%)	Don't know (%)
Digitalisation	79.2	13.0	7.8
Commercialisation	72.6	17.8	9.6
Early Intervention and Prevention	88.9	5.7	5.4
Independence	80.8	12.0	7.2
Efficient and Effective Organisation	85.0	7.8	7.2

- Respondents were asked if they thought the Council should invest in a number of service areas. The majority of respondents agreed that the Council should invest in all of the areas listed, with the most support for Extra Care/Community Hubs (83.9%) followed by Roads & Transport (80.3%).
- Respondents were provided with the following statement and asked whether they thought the Council should continue with such a strategy.

For a number of years the Council has used one off reserves (£1.1M for 2019/20) to balance its budget alongside delivering savings early in subsequent years to replace these reserves. It does so as part of a medium term financial strategy recognising that managing and balancing our budget is not a one off annual process

The majority of respondents (81.1%) fed back that the Council should continue with this strategy.

- At the public engagement events respondents were provided with a number of Council investment opportunities and asked to choose their top priorities, using “RCT money”. There were 11 investment boxes to choose from and people were given £1000 (1x £500, 1x £300, 1x £150 and 1x £50) and then asked to distribute the money. The following table shows the results of the engagement exercise;

Investment opportunities	Total
Extra Care & Community Hubs	£35,900
21st Century Schools	£29,150
Roads & Transport	£23,950
Employment	£22,750
Recycling & Environment	£20,900
Play Areas	£20,800
Towns & Regeneration	£17,700
Empty Properties	£13,200
Leisure	£9,500
Events & Arts	£6,200
Flood Alleviation	£5,800
Other	£4,700

- An engagement session was held with members of the OPAG (Older Persons Advisory Group). The general consensus from members of the group was to increase Council Tax and protect services. Comments are found in 5.6 - 5.11 of the report.
- An engagement session was held with the Rhondda Cynon Taf Disability Forum. Comments are found in section 5.13 - 5.17 of the report.
- The Council’s Finance and Performance Scrutiny Committee were consulted with (the minutes of which have not been included in this report) and a link to the consultation was circulated to all members of the School Budget Forum.
- An engagement event was held in Aberdare with young people from the youth forums in RCT. Comments are found in section 6 of the report.
- 3,966 people were engaged in the phase 1 budget consultation.

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This report presents the findings of the Phase 1 Budget Consultation 2020/21.
- 1.2 Section 2 outlines some brief background to the consultation process.
- 1.3 Section 3 details the methodology.
- 1.4 Section 4 provides the results of the online questionnaire.
- 1.5 Section 5 presents the feedback received at the engagement road show events, the Older Persons Advisory Group and Disability Forum meeting.
- 1.6 Section 6 provides feedback on the young persons' engagement events.
- 1.7 Section 7 provides the results of Social Media polls and some comments.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Council undertakes a comprehensive approach to its annual budget consultation, involving a large number of residents and key stakeholders.
- 2.2 The widespread approach we use and the range of views we capture provides senior managers and Cabinet Members 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.
- 2.3 Following the announcement of the General Election, the Welsh Government budget settlement to Local Government for the 2020/21 financial year was delayed. As a result Rhondda Cynon Taf's 2020/21 Budget Consultation is a phased approach, so that we can ensure residents and stakeholders have as much opportunity as possible to provide views on the budget and to make sure that views are informed by the most up to date and relevant information.
- 2.4 This report presents the findings of phase 1 of the budget consultation, where views were sought on;
 - level of Council Tax increase;

- the resources allocated to our schools;
- fees and charges levels;
- protection and prioritisation of services for additional resources;
- delivering more efficient services;
- Council priorities, investment opportunities and Council reserves;
and
- Council Tax Reduction Scheme.

2.5 Phase 1 started on the 21st November and ended on the 16th December 2019.

2.6 Phase 2 of the consultation will commence in January 2020 and will seek to obtain views on the proposed Budget Strategy for 2020/21.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Phase 1 of the Council's budget consultation ran from 21st November to the 16th December 2019.

3.2 The following methods were used to consult with stakeholders;

- An online questionnaire.
- A number of Town Centre, Leisure Centre and Library events.
- Promotion through Social media.
- Questions/polls on social media.
- Youth Forum.
- Older Persons Advisory Group Meeting.
- Disability Forum Meeting.
- Promotion with the Citizen's Panel.
- An email was sent to key stakeholders, including Community and Town Councils, Trade Unions, Councillors, Local AM's and MPs.

3.3 The following engagement events took place during the consultation;

Tuesday 26th November	Pontypridd Library
Tuesday 26th November	Llantrisant Leisure Centre
Wednesday 27th November	Porth Library
Thursday 28th November	Ferndale Hub
Thursday 28th November	Sobell Leisure Centre
Wednesday 4th December	Treorchy Co-op (with Recycling Team)
Wednesday 4th December	Rhondda Sports Centre
Thursday 5th December	Abercynon Library
Friday 6th December	Aberdare town centre (with recycling team)
Monday 9th December	Porth Morrisons
Monday 9th December	Sobell Leisure Centre
Tuesday 10th December	Hirwaun Library
Wednesday 11th December	Pontypridd town centre (with recycling team)
Thursday 12th December	Llantrisant Leisure Centre
Friday 13th December	Mountain Ash Hub

3.4 At the events, members of the public were invited to have a discussion with Officers and Councillors about the Council's budget, investments and any problems or queries they may have had. A number of budget boxes were used and "RCT money" was used to allow people to choose their investment priorities. Comments and ideas were also noted for this report.

- 3.5 The Council's Finance and Performance Scrutiny Committee were consulted with (the minutes of which have not been included in this report) and a link to the consultation was circulated to all members of the School Budget Forum.
- 3.6 3,966 people were engaged in the phase 1 budget consultation.

4 Questionnaire Results

- 4.1 The following section outlines the results from the budget questionnaire, which received 305 online responses. A selection of comments are provided and the full list of comments will be provided to Cabinet and senior officers to assist with decision making.

Council Tax

- 4.2 The majority of respondents felt that the Council should protect services at their current level through a 3% increase (80.8%).

Table 1: Council Tax preference

	%
Do you think the Council should.....	
Protect Council services at their current level through a 3% increase in Council Tax	80.8%
Reduce service levels to close any budget gap and keep any increase in Council Tax to a minimum	19.2%

A selection of comments can be found below;

Agree to maintain services and increase Council Tax

“A 3% increase is still quite low and is preferable to service closures”

“modest increases above 3% in line with neighbouring authorities would be justifiable to maintain and stabilise existing service levels”

“As a council tax payer I would happily accept an increase if it means that the Council can continue with the services it provides”

“no more than 3% or 4%”

“If a 3% increase enabled services to maintain current level of delivery then I would welcome this”

No increase in Council Tax

“A 3% increase means a tangible loss to my disposable income”

“Council tax is too high already”

“The Council tax can’t keep going up, it’s like another mortgage, people are struggling as it is”.

Neither option

“protect services, but no council tax increase”

“neither, it may only be 3% but we are already one of the highest”

“neither, already paying too much for a reduced service, a reduction of council tax is needed”

“Neither, too many services have already been cut”

Other

“Government needs to fund services better”

“services cannot be cut further, health education and social care are at breaking point already”

4.3 Respondents were also asked what their preferred level of Council Tax increase for next year would be. The results show that the majority of respondents (60.9%) would prefer a 3% increase (the current proposed level), 24.2% stating less than 3%, 11.1% suggesting an increase of more than 3% and 3.8% indicating more than 5%.

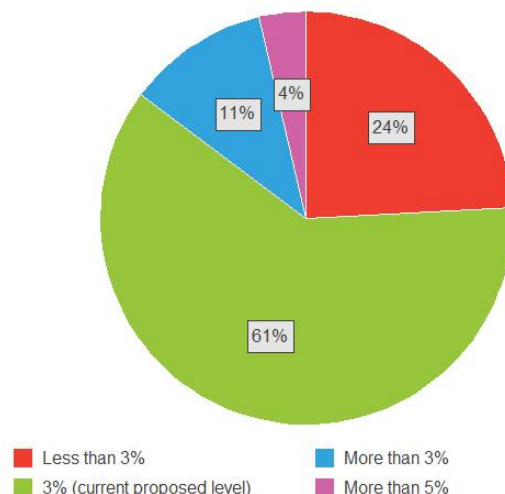


Figure 1 - Preferred level of Council Tax increase

Schools Budget

- 4.4 78% of respondents agreed that the Council should provide sufficient resources to fully cover increased pay costs in our schools.

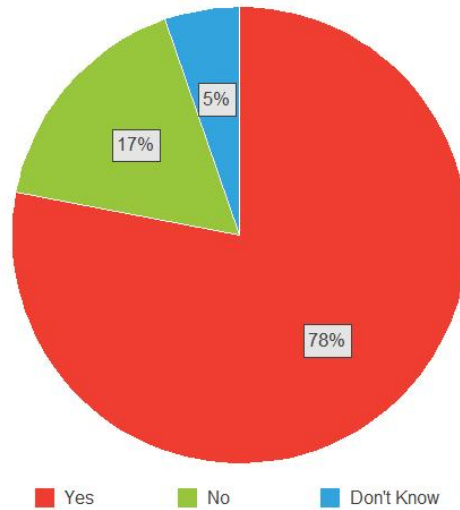


Figure 2 - Agreement with Schools Budget increase

Fees and Charges

- 4.5 Respondents were asked to state which services they would want to protect from an increase in fees and charges in 2020/21, based on the assumption that they would be increased by 1.5% (i.e. the Consumer Price Index (CPI)).

Table 2: Areas to protect from increase

Analysis % Respondents	Total			
		CPI (increase (1.5%))	Higher than CPI (higher than 1.5% increase)	Freeze (no increase)
School meals	301	37.9%	9.0%	53.1%
Leisure Centre Membership	297	53.8%	19.9%	26.3%
Leisure Centre Pay and Play	296	55.4%	20.6%	24.0%
Summer and Winter Playing Fees (Sports Clubs)	297	43.8%	16.8%	39.4%
Parking Charges	298	35.9%	15.8%	48.3%

Cinema (entrance fee)	297	51.9%	24.9%	23.2%
Pontypridd Lido (entry for adult users)	298	47.3%	37.9%	14.8%
Meals on Wheels	297	31.3%	14.8%	53.9%
Adult Social Care Charges (non-residential care services)	299	41.1%	7.7%	51.2%
Bereavement Fees	299	38.1%	8.4%	53.5%

4.6 The table shows that the majority (i.e. 50% or more) of respondents felt that fees and charges for the following services should be frozen (no increase);

- Meals on Wheels (53.9%);
- Bereavement Fees (53.5%);
- School Meals (53.2%); and
- Adult Social Care Charges (51.2%).

Those services with a majority suggesting an increase at 1.5% (i.e. the CPI level) were;

- Leisure Centre Pay and Play (55.4%);
- Leisure Centre Membership (53.9%); and
- Cinema (entrance fee) (51.9%).

It is worth noting that 37.9% of respondents suggested an increase higher than the CPI of 1.5% for the Pontypridd Lido, with only 14.8% suggesting a freeze.

4.7 A selection of comments are provided below;

Overall

“If you freeze some and increase others by more than 1.5%, you are penalising some areas. Increases across the board would seem fairer....”

“some of the above [list of fees] are considered a luxury for low income families, they would not want to pay for those additional, so I recommend that they are increased and costs reduced for essential services”

“Increase costs for those that choose to use facilities.... Services that are non-choice e.g. Bereavement services, should be frozen”

“Where things are essential then CPI seems reasonable, where extras then why not pay more”.

School Meals

“working parents in the Rhondda have been struggling it is important that children get a decent meal”

“school meals might be defined as a social service and therefore more essential than purely entertainment functions”

“school meals are often the only meal”

Leisure

“... Services like leisure memberships have room to increase in price while still competitive with big chains”

“start raising fees on leisure and cinemas, which lets face it are a luxury...”

Parking Charges

“increasing parking charges will further reduce footfall to local towns and businesses...”

Cinema

“If cinema fees were to increase then the cost would be much higher than commercial competitors within the area...”

Pontypridd Lido

“entrance fees for Lido are too low”

“...I would not mind an increase in the current adult fees, as the Lido provides such a vast and dynamic swimming and leisure experience”.

Adult Social Care Charges

“social care fees should be kept as low as possible, since they apply to the most vulnerable of our residents”

“I believe no further increases for vulnerable elderly adults”

Bereavement Fees

“Funeral poverty is resulting in a drain in local Authority purse as more families decline to make arrangements for loved ones....”

Other

“Fees directly involving children and their wellbeing should remain frozen...”

Council Services

- 4.8 Respondents were provided with a list of Council services and asked to choose which services should be protected and prioritised for any additional resources in 2020/21 and those that should not be protected.

Table 3: Council services to be protected and prioritised

	Protect and Prioritise	Do Not Protect
Schools (Current budget £153M)	90.0%	10.0%
School Support Services (£16M)	71.1%	28.9%
Libraries and Adult Learning (£3M)	53.0%	47.0%
Apprenticeship Scheme (£0.2M)	71.5%	28.5%
Youth Provision (£2M)	73.7%	26.3%
Access, Engagement & Inclusion (£10M)	51.8%	48.2%
Adult Social Care Services (£89M)	86.9%	13.1%
Children's Social Care Services (£46M)	93.8%	6.2%
Public Health (£5M)	70.4%	29.6%
Housing (£1M)	62.0%	38.0%
Parks (£5M)	61.2%	38.8%
Highways, Transport and Street care Services (£28M)	81.9%	18.1%
Waste and Recycling Services (£18M)	78.1%	21.9%
Cultural, Tourism and Heritage Services (£2M)	42.3%	57.7%
Regeneration (£1.5M)	59.7%	40.3%
Leisure Services (£4M)	51.1%	48.9%
Music Service (£0.1M)	36.5%	63.5%

- 4.9 The majority of services listed were asked to be prioritised and protected with the exception of;
- Music Service (63.5% do not protect); and
 - Cultural, Tourism and Heritage Services (57.7% do not protect).

- 4.10 The top 5 services that respondents wanted to protect and prioritise were;

- Children’s Social Care Services (93.8%);
- Schools (90%);
- Adult Social Care Services (86.9%);
- Highways, Transport and Street care Services (81.9%); and
- Waste and Recycling Services (78.1%).

Efficiencies

4.11 Respondents were provided with the following statement and asked whether they thought this was a good strategy.

Each year in balancing our budget and ensuring the effective use of resources, all our service managers are required to contribute toward a council-wide efficiency (savings) target of £6M. This means that all of our services are becoming more efficient, without impacting on front line services.

The majority of respondents thought this was a good strategy (90.6%) and 91.8% said that we should continue to expect our managers to deliver more efficient services.

4.12 The word cloud/map below provides a simple illustrated snapshot of some of the main efficiency saving comments received.

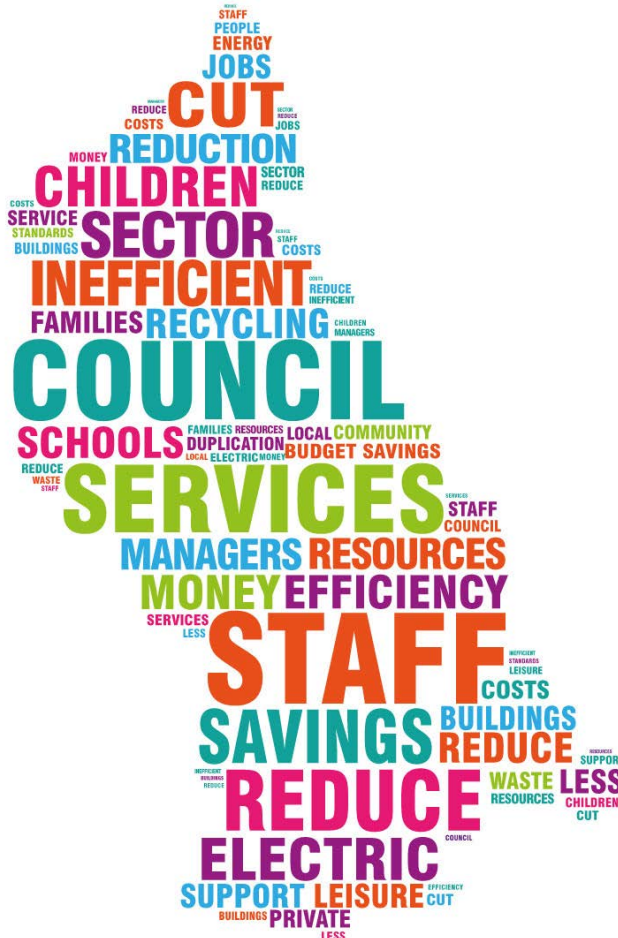


Figure 3 – Efficiency comments

- 4.13 The following comments provide some of the examples of how respondents felt the Council could be more efficient;

Note: A large number of responses were received and will be available to Councillors and Officers as part of the reporting process.

Energy Efficiency

“should become more efficient in regards to where its electric comes from, save money long term...”

“I think that being eco-friendly needs to be a priority”

“maximise opportunities provided by Council’s land and Buildings for local production of electricity and associated cost reduction and income generation”

Senior managers and Councillors

“too many managers and with too high salaries”

“too many high earners within the Council”

Buildings

“reduce number of council buildings”

“more energy efficient buildings”

“reduce the number of Council buildings across RCT”

“reduction in real estate”

Enforcement

“Actively fine residents for putting refuse out all weekend... fines for dog fouling”

Digitalisation/Agile working

“more agile work, less building and travel”

“better use of technology by staff and customers to provide the necessary services”

“offer home workingwhich will cut down on office space dramatically”

“home working to reduce council offices”

“do more online”

“increase mobile working and investment in technology to enable such scenarios”

Difficult for more Efficiency

“I think we’ve cut just about cut all we can in terms of frontline services”

“You can only become so efficient before you’re just making cuts”

Income generation

“look at ways of increasing income”

“Income generation –advertising”

Other

“ask people to opt in for Welsh rather than sending all correspondence in dual languages”

“I would like to see the authority bid for more grant funding”

- 4.14 Respondents were given the opportunity to provide any other comments on the budget and the following is a selection of those received:

Efficiency

“You cannot expect a continuous reduction whether you want to call it sheer cuts or “making it more efficient”

“There is a limit to efficiency savings - too far and the service will become inefficient as there won’t be enough staff to deliver any sort of service”

“Efficiency savings should only be made where they do not have a direct impact on front line services such as adult and child care, health and education”

“General efficiency savings are welcomed (so long as they focus on natural wastage rather than redundancies and closing down services).....”

Staff/Employment

“Job cuts in local authorities are not the way forward. We need to maintain an effective working local authority that we can all be proud of”

“Offer homeworking/agile working to all members of staff, which will cut down office space dramatically.”

“More opportunities should be given to more people leaving school and commencing full time employment. Such as more apprenticeship post and more graduate posts being created”

Social Care

“The council could release pressure on its social care budgets if they develop "Council social care apprenticeships" and create opportunities for young people to get a foothold onto employment or step-up to further education in social care, particularly those without good parental guidance or from poorer households that may not have any direction.”

“More local access/services/support for Families/Children/Adults of all ages, with Long-Term health/wellbeing/learning Difficulties & Disabilities”

Schools

“I think that schools should be a priority for the Council.”

“More money for schools and social care”

Positive

“Compared to other councils the services in RCT are fairly good

“It has been good to see investment made in areas such as Taff Vale even though Council budgets are reducing”

“The public events are helpful to understand things better”

“Generally, I think you do an amazing job trying to balance the books, protect vital services and keep everyone happy. My experience as a householder of recycling is excellent (RCT is way ahead of many English counties where we have friends).”

“Good to see the council managing the budget better than most”

Other

“More investment in regeneration projects”

“Lobby for more funding”

“investment into leisure and sport to ensure people can be active/healthy and accessible opportunities in leisure facilities and playing fields/3gs for clubs and community groups”

“Look at ways to generate more income”

“We need to look economic growth. Reignite the business club. Stimulate future business startup appetite in RCT in schools.”

The Council’s Priorities

4.15 The Council focuses on five key areas to maximise resources and deliver improved services.

- **Digitalisation** – taking the opportunity new technology provides to deliver better services for residents, visitors, businesses and how we operate internally
- **Commercialisation** – utilising our scale and expertise to deliver services for other organisations and customers and thereby generate income
- **Early Intervention and Prevention** – investing in preventative services to deliver savings in the medium term.
- **Independence** – reshaping our services for vulnerable residents to ensure that we promote independence and deliver first class care services.
- **Efficient and Effective Organisation** – challenging our ongoing service delivery and driving out further efficiencies through for example, a reduction in administration costs and reducing property costs linked to new ways of working, for example through agile working.

4.16 Respondents were asked if they thought the Council should focus on these key areas. As you can see in the table and figure below, the majority of respondents agreed with all of the key areas, with the highest response being for Early Intervention and Prevention (88.9%).

Table 4: Key areas of focus

	Yes (%)	No (%)	DK (%)
Digitalisation	79.2	13.0	7.8
Commercialisation	72.6	17.8	9.6
Early Intervention and Prevention	88.9	5.7	5.4
Independence	80.8	12.0	7.2
Efficient and Effective Organisation	85.0	7.8	7.2

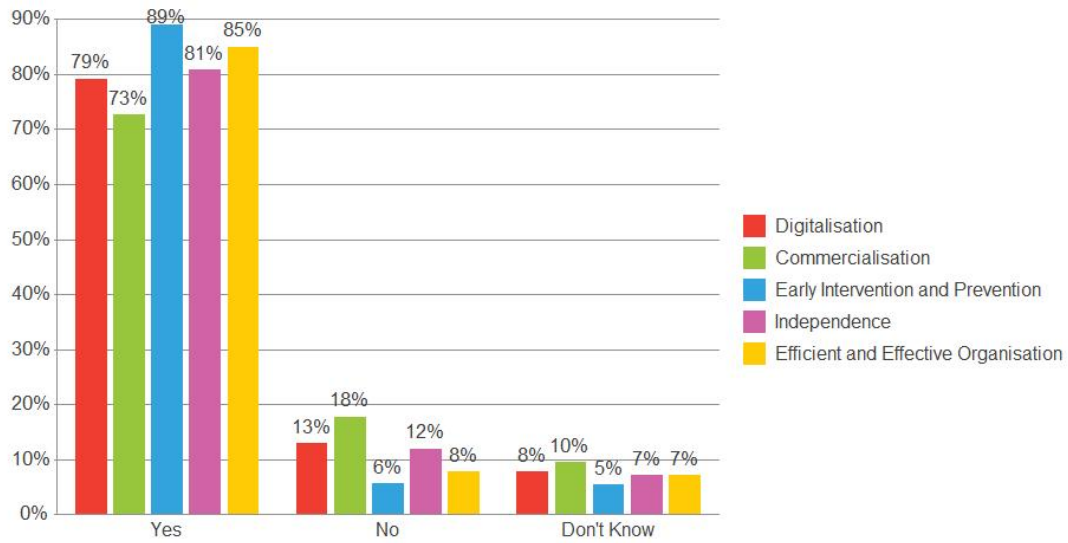


Figure 4 - Agreement with focus on 5 key areas

Council Investment Opportunities

4.17 Respondents were asked if they thought the Council should invest in a number of service areas. As you can see the majority of respondents agreed that the Council should invest in all of the areas suggested, with the most support for Extra Care/Community Hubs (83.9%), followed by Roads & Transport (80.3%).

Table 5: Areas of Investment

Analysis % Respondents			
	Yes	No	Don't Know
21st Century Schools (new and remodelled schools)	72.5%	18.0%	9.5%
Roads & Transport (repairs and resurfacing and major projects such as A4119 dualling, Llanharan bypass and Mountain Ash Cross Valley link)	80.3%	15.2%	4.5%
Recycling & the Environment (improving recycling performance)	76.5%	19.7%	3.8%
Town Centres & Regeneration (improving the town centres eg. Llys Cadwyn, Pontypridd)	71.6%	22.9%	5.5%
Empty Properties (Grant to bring properties back into use)	76.0%	18.1%	5.9%
Leisure (improvements to facilities)	54.3%	36.4%	9.3%
Play Areas and Parks (upgrading the equipment and standard)	68.2%	25.4%	6.4%
Extra Care/Community Hubs (focus on independence for older people)	83.9%	10.6%	5.5%
Employment (apprenticeships and graduate placements)	74.4%	18.4%	7.2%
Events/Arts (investment in attractions and theatres)	47.9%	41.2%	10.9%

Flood Alleviation (investing in flood prevention schemes)	70.2%	21.1%	8.7%
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4.18 The word cloud/map below provides a simple illustrated snapshot of some of the main investment comments received.



Figure 5 – Investment comments

4.19 The following are a selection of comments received on the Council’s investment areas;

21st Century Schools

“Remodelling of old school buildings is necessary but I don’t believe the formation of large through schools will benefit the pupils living in areas of deprivation.”

“The school building is not important it is the level of teaching that matters.”

Roads & Transport

“Transport, there needs to be planning for cycle paths in every new road project. It is ridiculous to improve roads without adding safe cycle routes”

“Given the need to get more private cars off the roads the transport expenditure should be focussed on improving public transport, particularly in the evenings and at weekends (including public holidays)”

Recycling & the Environment

“I think we are doing enough at present in regards to recycling in RCT and continue at this level without an increase in investment”

“Look at circular economy for waste management. Is there anything you can reclaim and resell?”

“Must invest in areas of council activity which support climate change adaptation and Net Zero commitments”

Town Centres & Regeneration

“Town centres have become a thing of the past, everything is done online and I feel no matter what is done, numbers will not rise to a significant level to justify money being used”

“Regeneration on towns on a need basis. Get in get each town clean tidy and nice to visit.”

Empty Properties

“Tackling empty buildings needs to be considered”

“Maybe incentives for empty shops and 'start up' businesses”

Leisure

“playing field improvements and 3g usage over weekends”

“Green playing fields and changing facilities must meet minimum standards to help community groups promote leisure activities”

Extra Care/Community Hubs

*“Extra Care/community Hubs - shouldn't be focused on just, independence for older people (ONLY) *It should be Independence for ALL AGES**”*

Employment

“More jobs need creating in the valleys so that so many people don't need to be leaving to go out of the valleys on a daily basis, causing endless traffic and air pollution”

“more apprenticeships and work experience opportunities”

“Small business and start up grant provision would be good”

Events/Arts

“Leisure Arts investment should be tied to ability to generate income - people expect a certain standard of provision and may pay more if this standard is exceeded.”

Flood Alleviation

“If flood prevention was more prominent would likely save in long term against home/business owners claiming due to damages etc.”

“With regards to flood alleviation ... more emphasis should be put on house building companies to contribute more to such schemes.”

Other

“Good to see so much investment in RCT”

“I consider those chosen are necessities which should be prioritised for investment first given the financial difficulties.”

“Would like to see more money in youth services”

Council Reserves

- 4.20 Respondents were provided with the following statement and asked if they thought that the Council should continue with such a strategy.

For a number of years the Council has used one off reserves (£1.1M for 2019/20) to balance its budget alongside delivering savings early in subsequent years to replace these reserves. It does so as part of a medium term financial strategy recognising that managing and balancing our budget is not a one off annual process

The majority of respondents (81.1%) think the Council should continue with this strategy.

5. ENGAGEMENT EVENTS

- 5.1 This section outlines the results of the face to face consultation discussions held in the town centres, leisure centres and libraries along with feedback received from the older person's advisory group (OPAG) and Disability Forum meetings.
- 5.2 A large number of engagement events were held across Rhondda Cynon Taf, the details of which are provided in the methodology.
- 5.3 The engagement events and meetings form part of the Council's ongoing approach to face to face resident engagement.

Council Investment Areas

- 5.4 Respondents were provided with a number of Council investment opportunities and asked to choose their top priorities, using "RCT money". There were 11 investment boxes to choose from and people were given £1000 (1x £500, 1x £300, 1x £150 and 1x £50) and then asked to distribute the money.
- 5.5 The following table shows the results of the engagement exercise;

Table 6: Engagement exercise priorities

Investment opportunities	Total
Extra Care & Community Hubs	£35,900
21st Century Schools	£29,150
Roads & Transport	£23,950
Employment	£22,750
Recycling & Environment	£20,900
Play Areas	£20,800
Towns & Regeneration	£17,700
Empty Properties	£13,200
Leisure	£9,500
Events & Arts	£6,200
Flood Alleviation	£5,800
Other	£4,700

A selection of the comments received are shown below;

21st Century Schools

"Schools is most important to me"

"Schools always need money."

"Schools / education is really important."

Roads & Transport

"Roads & Transport - there are a lot more cars on the road now."

"Roads and transport box should be divided into roads and another. Public transport to improve roads need to get people to use public transport."

"Roads need investment, topography, weather affects roads, bring them up to standard"

"Roads always need improving"

Recycling & the Environment

"Recycling & Environment - Pontyclun pretty lucky around here - good recycling / rubbish"

"Recycling - Llantwit Fardre - opening times restricted not helpful went to pick up recycling bags and closed in day"

"Recycling - environmental needs to be a separate box, climate change affects everything"

"Recycling is important to us - hope this touches on flooding and investment would improve this."

"Recycling is good here!"

"Pretty good recycling"

"Dog mess is a big issue in lane by my house I report it to Council and they are good at responding"

"Invest much more in protecting the environment and educating the people how to do so. Focus on - recycling, reducing carbon footprint and sustainability."

"Pest Control should be free and not have to pay £28"

"Recycling - this is important"

"Keeping streets clean will help with flooding"

Town Centres & Regeneration

"If Town centres were regenerated, you wouldn't have big retail parks and would have more green spaces which would also be good for environment."

"Towns & Regeneration - Aberdare needs shops"

"Aberdare - Car parks now cheaper is brilliant - noticed an increase in cars in parks"

"Towns - nothing to draw me to Porth - lots of pound shops, mostly go to Talbot Green - parking is important."

"Towns - need a variety of shops - older people will miss out as there's nothing to do here. Big name shops closing so affects smaller shops."

"Treorchy good town centre"

"Aberdare needs more done"

"Town centre - too many empty shops / up for sale as businesses leaving. Council reduce business rates"

Empty Properties

"Council tax - empty properties, If it were my house, it's my money, I should be able to do with what I want."

"Empty properties important, little space to build new. Turn empty pubs into flats"

"It depends on circumstances (empty properties), e.g. if a parent dies and then you need to clean the house and try to sell it, which could take up to a year..."

"We've got 2 empty properties, had leaflets through our door about this and it's pushing us to do something so it's good"

"Ferndale - Council could do more about empty properties in the area."

"Empty properties - housing and affordable housing is a problem. I agree with tax for empty properties."

“Empty Properties - should have a limit of 10 years whereby after that, the council buys it and takes over. There should be standards.”

“Empty properties - if a property is empty for more than 5 years it should be bought back by the Council so it won't be empty anymore.”

Leisure

“Leisure has too much funding already”

“Leisure is really important to help keep people healthy”

Play Areas and Parks

“Children play area don't need as many outside activities but think inside activities to keep entertained.”

“Parks important especially for young people”

“Play areas - Better lighting needed in children's' parks - in winter when dark early you can't go there”

“Play areas very important for the children”

Extra Care/Community Hubs

“Extra care - this is important as you've got to think about the future”

“Extra care - good idea. I'm an ex NHS employee and know a lot of people struggle especially with mental health so these are good to socialise and support people without relying on NHS.”

“Extra care should stay local”

“Extra Care & Community Hubs - we use Cynon linc and this is good”

“Extra care is important for me as I get older”

Employment

“Employment - Metro - updated services - hopefully this will help jobs. Not a lot of jobs in Rhondda.”

“All for apprenticeships”

“Employment - having 2 grandchildren, this is important.”

Events/Arts

“Use Park and Dare it is a good cheap day out, with shows, school concerts and pantomimes.”

“Events - Seems to be more happening in Coliseum Aberdare, more needed in Parc & Dare.”

“Parc and Dare needs a bit of tidying up. Pricey”

Other

“money should be spent on libraries”

“Community libraries in smaller areas need money.”

“Free school meals for all low income households not just those unemployed for primary and secondary.”

“something for teenagers to get them out off the street”

“Homelessness + housing support is currently inadequate”

Older Person Advisory Group (OPAG)

- 5.6 An engagement session was held with members of the OPAG reflecting the questions asked in the online questionnaire.

The general consensus from all members of the OPAG was to increase Council Tax and protect services.

“It always go up and people expect it to go up about 4%”

“3% is about right. Pembrokeshire went up 12%”

“3.6% was quite reasonable no need to reduce that, same as last year”

“Not getting council tax from empty properties.”

- 5.7 Views on the School Budget included;

“That’s our future, you can’t deprive the future.”

“Some buildings need refurbishing”

“Encourage teachers to come in from other areas”

5.8 A number of Fees and Charges were discussed;

School meals

“Everything goes up and as long as it’s nutritious”

“If you have a few children it can be difficult, we do fundraising with the schools.”

Leisure:

“Not everybody can commit to a month, so it can be expensive to pay as you go”

Sports clubs

“Small clubs can they afford it? A lot of money for the kids clubs. Could freeze this one.”

Lido

“Not expensive for swimming.”

5.9 Protect and Prioritise

Very difficult to go through the list, I don’t want to protect music, but there will be those that do. All should be protected.

“Schools and libraries are a priority.”

“Youth provision”.

5.10 Efficiencies

“Normally means saving money, make everything going online, that this is not good for older people. Good strategy but must still consider with older people.”

“Can contribute to isolation.”

5.11 Council’s Priorities

“Roads – think there is waste of money in filling pot holes, should do the whole road.”

“Invest in all of them.”

“Money seems to be going to some areas more than others, people are saying, but they say the same in different areas.”

Disability Forum

5.12 An engagement session was held with the Rhondda Cynon Taf Disability Forum where a presentation was given and a general discussion held around the questions in the online questionnaire. A selection of the comments are shown below.

5.13 Council Tax

“Reshaping some of the services may make them better”.

“If increased, hope that it makes a difference to services.”

“Services are especially important for vulnerable people with mental health problems.”

“% increase will depend on pensions and allowances”.

“Councillor expenses are good value for money if they are doing a good job.”

“Increase makes sense if performance is good, if not there should not be an increase in council tax.”

“3% better than what has been suggested in Pembrokeshire”

5.14 Schools Budget

“What is cut because of the increase to schools?”

“What are the pension costs?”

“What happens to Special Needs Schools?”

5.15 Fees and Charges

“Freeze where possible. Increase in leisure impacts on healthy lifestyles, the same for sports club fees, due to its impact on members. It should be access for all.”

“Freeze school meals”

“Adult social care gone up anyway, linked to NHS”

“Would freeze most as any increase would have an impact due to the poverty levels in the areas.”

Council Service Priorities

“Highways and footpaths should be prioritised for accessibility and safety, including crossings.”

5.16 Efficiencies

“Yes, general agreement, should be more prominent. Hold to account for the services they deliver.”

“Public views important to report issues and to hold the Council accountable.”

“Feedback on the consultation important.”

5.17 Investments

“Attract tourism for disabled people, there is a big opportunity here.”

“Roads a big yes, reduce congestion, will ultimately help everyone.”

“Cycle routes important to reduce congestion.”

6. YOUNG PERSON ENGAGEMENT

6.1 An engagement event was held in Aberdare with young people from the youth forums across RCT.

6.2 **Feedback**

The following section outlines some of the feedback received.

6.3 Similar to the other engagement activities with members of the public, the young people were provided with a number of Council investment opportunities and asked to choose their top priorities, using “RCT money”. There were 11 investment boxes to choose from and young people were given £1000 (1x £500, 1x £300, 1x £150 and 1x £50) and then asked to distribute the money. Their priorities were as follows:

Table 7: Youth engagement priorities

Investment opportunities	Total
Recycling & Environment	£4,000
Employment	£2,800
Towns & Regeneration	£2,450
Extra Care & Community Hubs	£1,800
Play Areas	£1,600
Other	£1,550
Roads & Transport	£1,400
Empty Properties	£1,150
Events & Arts	£1,000
Leisure	£1,050
21st Century Schools	£800
Flood Alleviation	£400

6.4 As can be seen in the table above, the investment opportunities receiving the majority of money were recycling & environment, employment and towns and regeneration.

6.5 Following this exercise, the young people took part in a discussion with the consultation officers present asking what their priorities were, which boxes they had put their money in and why? A selection of the comments can be found below:

What is your priority?

“Play areas and parks because I don’t think there are enough of them. I put £500 in the box.”

“£300 in recycling because black bags aren’t collected as much as they should be and more bins.”

“£50 in flood alleviation.”

“£500 in town centres, I’d like to see more of what they’re doing in Ponty, Treorchy was shortlisted as one of the best towns.”

“£300 in transport and roads”

“£150 in unemployment”

“£50 on environment as we need more bins”

“£500 on town centres.”

“£300 on leisure as there’s not much for young people. This forum – not many people know about it, it needs to be advertised more for young people.”

“£150 on parks for youth.”

“£50 unemployment as there’s not much around here, build up town centres, encourage people to come here.”

“£500 on roads. It’s good to see connections and links to make people less reliant on cars.”

“£300 on the environment because of much of the same reason.”

“£150 on extra care because we need more for old people.”

“£50 for employment to try and improve employment areas for modern jobs.”

- 6.6 ‘Other’ was the sixth highest priority with £1,550 in the box. The young people discussed why they had put their money in ‘Other’ and also went on to further discuss some of the other investment areas:

Other

“I didn’t know what to choose, I don’t like being limited with choices.”

“Travel.”

“Sexual health awareness and relationship in schools, it’s not LGBT inclusive, we need more pastoral care.”

“Play grounds and parks, it’s all well having them but they are unattended, invest in upkeep and maintenance.”

“Girl guiding & cadets are severely underfunded. There are enough organisations they just have to be supported more.”

“Buildings are run down and they aren’t doing anything with them, bring them back into use, i.e Co-op in Tonypany”

“Free transport for young people, especially for education. Education should be free and free to get to.”

“Young people miss out on a lot of opportunities as it’s expensive to get there. Places aren’t easy to get to.”

“Improve transport and bring it back into the community.”

“Students would like to use the gym/leisure out of summer holidays to keep fit, not just in the summer holidays.”

7. Social Media Feedback

7.1 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 consultation process.

7.2 The following results were received;

Poll 1 - Do you think the Council should: Protect Council services at current level through 3% increase in Council Tax? Or Reduce service levels to close budget gap and keep increase in Council Tax to a minimum?

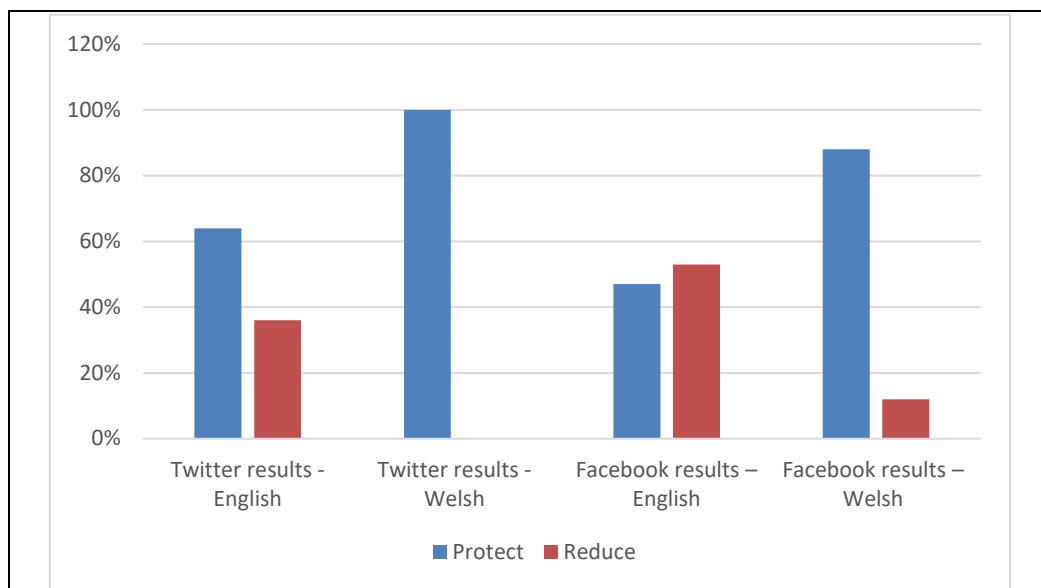


Figure 6 – Social media poll 1 results

7.3 Poll 2 - To ensure the Council can continue to maintain & improve services in the face of continued cuts to public sector funding we are focusing on the areas: Early Intervention and Prevention, Digitalisation, Independence, Efficiency, Commercialisation. Do you agree with this approach?

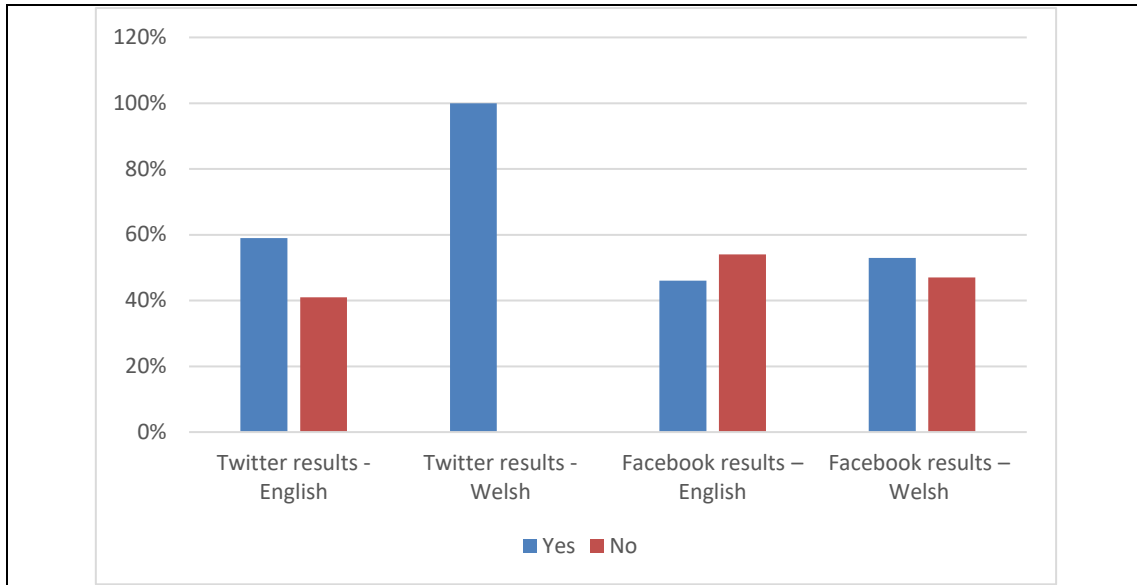


Figure 7 – Social media poll 2 results