



## **RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

### **CABINET**

**14<sup>th</sup> FEBRUARY 2019**

#### **THE COUNCIL'S 2019/2020 REVENUE BUDGET**

#### **REPORT OF THE GROUP DIRECTOR CORPORATE & FRONTLINE SERVICES.**

**AUTHOR:** Chris Lee (01443 424026)

#### **1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

- 1.1 This report provides Cabinet with information in respect of the 2019/2020 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 31<sup>st</sup> March 2020, 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 2019/2020 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 31<sup>st</sup> March 2020, 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 2019/2020 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.
- 2.5 Authorise the Group Director for Corporate and Frontline Services to incorporate any further decision of Cabinet and Council, as appropriate, into the Budget Strategy with a consequential adjustment made to the use of transition funding.

### **3.0 BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 The revenue budget for the financial year ending the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2020, 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.
- 3.2 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.
- 3.3 A draft timetable for agreeing the 2019/2020 revenue budget strategy is attached at Appendix A2.

### **4.0 THE KEY ELEMENTS OF A BALANCED BUDGET STRATEGY FOR 2019/2020**

- 4.1 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 Minister for Housing and Local Government (Julie James AM) on the 19<sup>th</sup> December 2018 (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 2019/2020.
- 4.2 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 3.6%.

- 4.3 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.
- 4.4 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.

## **5.0 CONCLUSIONS**

- 5.1 The Senior Leadership Team holds the collective view that the Council should commit itself to setting its 2019/2020 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.
- 5.2 A translation of the Senior Leadership Team's recommended strategic approach into a high level budget for 2019/2020 with a Council Tax increase of 3.6% is attached to this report.
- 5.3 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.

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## **APPENDIX A**

### **RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**14<sup>th</sup> FEBRUARY 2019**

#### **A DISCUSSION PAPER PREPARED BY THE SENIOR LEADERSHIP TEAM IN RESPONSE TO THE 2019/2020 LOCAL GOVERNMENT SETTLEMENT**

**AUTHOR: CHRIS LEE - GROUP DIRECTOR, CORPORATE AND FRONTLINE  
SERVICES (01443) 424026**

### **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 31<sup>st</sup> March 2020, the Cabinet must consider:
- The Council's own financial position.
  - The financial and service implications of the Welsh Government's (WG) 2019-2020 local government settlement.
  - Our Cwm Taf – Cwm Taf Wellbeing Plan 2018 -2023.
  - 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 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 2019/2020 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 2018/19. A key starting point and important consideration is the annual statement of accounts. At the Council meeting on the 19<sup>th</sup> of September 2018, 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 31<sup>st</sup> March 2018 is £4.665M. 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 £4.840M (additional in year savings to date of £0.175M).
- 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 31<sup>st</sup> March 2020. 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 2019/2020 LOCAL GOVERNMENT SETTLEMENT**

3.1 On the 19<sup>th</sup> December 2018, the Minister for Housing and Local Government (Julie James AM) announced the Final 2019/2020 Local Government Settlement. The Minister's statement and key data table is attached at Appendix 3.

3.2 The "headlines" of the 2019/2020 Settlement are as follows:-

- a. The overall reported increase in Revenue Support Grant (RSG) and Non-Domestic Rates funding for 2019/2020 (of unhypothecated funding) at an all Wales level, is +0.2% (+£10.295M), but this is before new responsibilities are taken into account totalling £7.000M.
- b. The final reported settlement for Rhondda Cynon Taf, shows an increase of 0.8% 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 -0.3%.
- c. A 'floor' protection has been included for 2019/20, set at -0.3% and is funded from resources outside of the Settlement (total 'Top Up Funding is £3.470M).
- d. The Settlement includes 'transfers in' of (Rhondda Cynon Taf impact in brackets):
  - £8.069M in respect of the Teachers Pay Grant (£0.662M)
  - £5.000M in respect of Free School Meals Grant (£0.424M)
- e. The settlement includes 'new responsibilities' of £7.000M in respect of increasing the Capital Limits for Residential Care to £50,000 (£0.542M for Rhondda Cynon Taf). It also includes an additional £2.400M (non-hypothecated) to support additional discretionary rates relief for local businesses.
- f. There is no reference to indicative 2020/21 settlement levels.
- g. Detail on some specific grants are still not available. In particular the respective allocations for individual grants on a local authority basis are still outstanding for many, including:
  - Schools Funding Grant - £15M all Wales
  - Social Services Grant - £30M all Wales

- h. The Council's General Capital Funding allocation has increased to £13.441M. This includes £30M of Welsh Government's £100M increase in General Capital funding over 3 years (to 2020/21). The Minister's statement notes that the total all Wales general capital funding level will be £193M for 2019/20 (which includes £20M for the Public Highways Refurbishment Grant).

#### **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 2019/2020. These are:

- a) Social Care pressures £1.100M – this reflects the growing cost of providing care to our most vulnerable residents.
- b) Waste including gate fee increases and nappy collection £0.244M – additional costs associated with residual waste disposal and increased demand for the Council's nappy collection.
- c) General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) / Data protection £0.182M – costs reflect increased resources needed to ensure on-going compliance with GDPR requirements.
- d) Digital £0.427M - additional costs associated with Microsoft licenses linked to nationally negotiated contracts in addition to costs of further development and roll out of the Council's agile working arrangements and modernisation of business practises.
- e) South Wales Fire and Rescue Service (SWFRA) -£0.137M – notification received (subject to final confirmation ) of the level of the Fire Service Levy for 2019/20 which is below the level initially modelled. One notable caveat however relates to the funding of additional costs of the firefighter pension fund following the latest valuation and the Government Actuary indicating a 10% increase in the contribution rate. This is estimated to cost the SWFRA £2.9M which if not funded by central government, they could subsequently pass on to constituent authorities. This could increase the level of their levy by £0.454M for this Council. They await confirmation of funding arrangements, as indeed we do ourselves in respect of Teachers Pension costs (see para 6.11).
- 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 2019/20. The overall net increase in costs added to the base requirements at Final Settlement stage totals £0.275M.

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

**Table 1: Recent Base Budget Updates Impacting on the 2019/20 Base**

	<b>£M</b>
Social Care Pressures	1.100
Waste Services	0.244
Data Protection Requirements	0.182
Digital Requirements	0.427
Fire Service Levy	<b>-0.137</b>
Other	0.275
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>2.091</b>

## **5.0 THE FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE 2019/2020 SETTLEMENT FOR RHONDDA CYNON TAF**

5.1 The final settlement indicates that our 2019/2020 RSG and NDR funding will total £367.339M.

5.2 In anticipation of the 2019/2020 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 (24<sup>th</sup> October 2018) at the Provisional Settlement stage indicated a budget gap of £5.920M. This position assumed a modelled 3.0% Council Tax increase, savings already secured early in 2018/19 (£1.027M) and a commitment to deliver £6M of efficiency savings in 2019/20. 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 £2.156M) means that the budget gap has now reduced to £5.855M (a net decrease of £0.065M).

5.4 In addition, the settlement as referenced in section 3.2 included a new responsibility in relation to increasing the Capital Limits for Residential Care to £50,000 which for this Council equates to £0.542M and also additional funding to support NDR relief, in respect of which £0.100M has been set aside in the base budget. Taking these two additional requirements into account means that the budget gap increases by £0.642M to **£6.497M**.

## **6.0 DEVELOPING AN EQUITABLE, DELIVERABLE AND BALANCED BUDGET FOR 2019/2020**

- 6.1 It will not be easy for us to develop an equitable and deliverable revenue budget strategy given the modest 0.8% 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 2019/20 by 3.60%, that is, above the 3.00% modelled in the initial budget gap calculations. Increasing the level by 0.60% will lower the budget gap by £0.506M for 2019/20, hence the updated gap becomes **£5.991M**.

- 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 £1.081M (at the 2019/20 tax base level), but will also cost £0.238M in additional CTRS requirements. It therefore follows that a 1% increase generates a net additional income of £0.843M, or stated another way, almost one quarter (22%) 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 2019/20 and an initial net "funding gap" of almost £13M before any savings and efficiencies are applied, this gap is projected to rise significantly over the three years to 2021/22 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 2019/2020.

#### 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.
- 6.9 Members will be aware that as part of the initial budget modelling assumptions a £1M cash uplift for schools had been built into the Medium Term Financial Plan which had subsequently been increased to £2.200M at Provisional Settlement stage. Given the improved Final Settlement and the priority to support schools, it is now proposed that a £5.200M cash uplift is provided in 2019/20. This additional resource will support the pressure associated with teacher's pay growth (excluding the additional costs of Pension Costs for teachers), support one off restructuring costs across schools and will provide additional base support to schools over and above what is also likely to be received through specific grants<sup>1</sup>. In cash terms, this represents a 3.5% increase to the school's budget, which is set in the context of the Council as a whole receiving an increase of 0.8% from Welsh Government.
- 6.10 The result of providing this increase to schools is that the overall schools budget for next year will increase from £148.819M to £154.019M in cash terms with £2.700M of this being built into the base and £2.500M being via one off and pass-ported funding. This will see our schools treated more favourably than other Council services but like other services, it is acknowledged that capping the increase to £5.200M does mean that an element of efficiency planning will be required at a school level. This proposal would see the overall school base budget requirement increasing by £0.500M over and above that already included at Provisional Settlement stage, leaving a remaining overall budget gap for the Council of **£6.491M**.

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<sup>1</sup> Including Schools Funding Grant (all Wales total £15M)

- 6.11 As per the position at Provisional Settlement, any additional costs relating to Teacher's pensions have not been included in the budget position at this time and confirmation is still awaited on the quantum and timing of funding to cover the cost implications (estimated to be £3.1M for 2019/20, part year effect from September 2019). The Department for Education (DfE) in England are currently consulting on a proposal to fully fund the impact upon schools (in England). If no confirmation is received prior to final budget setting, it is proposed that an additional 'temporary' allocation is made from transitional funding and / or other earmarked or general reserves, over and above that already recommended in paragraph 6.13 to cover this and any impact from an amended Fire Service Levy as referenced in paragraph 4.1(e).

#### Dealing With The Remaining Revenue Budget Gap

- 6.12 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 2019/20.
- 6.13 Following careful consideration, the following approach is recommended:
- a. *Use of Specific Grants (£2.600M)* – The Final Settlement noted two new specific grants provided by Welsh Government to support funding pressures in 2019/20 (£30M Social Services and £2.300M Children's Services at an all Wales level). Whilst individual local authority allocations have not yet been made available, £2.600M of additional funding is estimated for this Council (subject to confirmation from Welsh Government).
  - b. *Efficiencies* – The Council has successfully delivered nearly £90m 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 again targeted for 2019/20 and confirmed at Provisional Settlement stage. Notwithstanding this target level, additional efficiency savings have now been identified bringing the efficiency total to £6.121M and as such a further £0.121M can be set against the budget gap.
  - c. *Fees & Charges* - A report on the proposed level of Fees & Charges for 2019/20 will be presented to Cabinet on the 14<sup>th</sup> February 2019. Subject to Cabinet approval, this proposes a standard increase of 2.9%, with a number of specific exceptions including no increases for Car Park charges, Summer and Winter Playing Fields, School Meals, Pontypridd Lido, Rhondda Heritage Park admissions and Cinema Entrance Fees.

The report also includes a proposed increase of £0.15 for Meals on Wheels (including Day Centre Meals) and the conclusion of a review of licensing fees for Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs).

The budgetary impact of the Fees & Charges proposals, if agreed, reduces the budget gap by £0.042M.

- d. *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 21<sup>st</sup> November 2018), the projected underspend in this area was £0.366M. 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 2019/20 by £0.300M. It should be noted that whilst this takes the budget to £24.336M, this is still in excess of the Welsh Government funding for this area which for 2019/20 totals £21.681M.
- e. Office Accommodation (£0.517M) – savings and income generated from our on-going rationalisation of office accommodation, including the lease of the former Ty Dysgu building, the vacating of Heddfan and maximisation / occupancy of the Valleys Innovation Centre.
- f. Capital Charges (£1.030M) - our low risk treasury management strategy has seen us maximise the use of internal borrowing for a number of years which has resulted in lower costs of servicing external debt (loans). We have recently and in line with advice from our treasury management advisors, taken the opportunity to borrow in advance of an environment where rates are at a greater risk of increasing. A review of our longer term capital charge requirement has resulted in the base budget being reduced.
- g. Materials Recovery Facility (£0.458M) - Cabinet on the 16<sup>th</sup> October 2018, agreed to support the procurement of state of the art modern technology to enable the Council's recycling to be processed in a more efficient manner. Following installation this will result in lower processing costs to the Council (part year benefit for 2019/20).
- h. *Medium Term Financial Planning and Service Transformation Reserve (Transitional Funding)* – Whilst efficiency savings and cost reduction measures are already in place for 2019/20, 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 £4.840M. To address the current

budget deficit, it is proposed that an allocation of £1.423M is made from this reserve for 2019/20. This would facilitate a balanced budget for 2019/20 and would leave £3.417M in the reserve (subject to the year-end assessment of reserves post March 31<sup>st</sup> 2019). 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. 14 In summary, Table 3 lists the proposals recommended to close the remaining budget gap for 2019/20, that will deliver a balanced budget for next year:

**Table 3 : Budget Strategy Proposals 2019/20**

	£M	£M
<b>Budget Gap</b>		<b>6.491</b>
<b><i>Strategy Proposals</i></b>		
Use of Specific Grants	-2.600	
Additional Efficiency (over and above the £6M)	-0.121	
Fees & Charges	-0.042	
Council Tax Reduction Scheme	-0.300	
Office Accommodation	-0.517	
Capital Charges	-1.030	
Materials Recovery Facility	-0.458	
		<b>-5.068</b>
<b>Remaining Budget Gap</b>		<b>1.423</b>
<b><i>Use of 'One Off' Funding</i></b>		
Service Transformation Reserve		<b>-1.423</b>
<b>Total</b>		<b>0.000</b>

### Service Priorities

- 6.15 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.
- 6.16 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.

- 6.17 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 October 2018 provided an additional £23.550M of funding to support various schemes including major Highway Infrastructure requirements, Strategic Regeneration Opportunities, Modern Business Accommodation at Coedely and Robertstown, Community Hubs and Extracare, alongside continued and significant investment (£12M) across our Highways network.
- 6.18 Cabinet at its meeting on the 25<sup>th</sup> 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 2019/20 and a report setting out the updated capital programme for 2019/20 to 2021/22 will be reported for Members consideration shortly.

## **7.0 2019/2020 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 2018/2019 revenue budget and the regular performance monitoring reports are available to the Cabinet, to act as a benchmark to evaluate 2018/2019 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 2018/2019 figures, depending upon Members' decisions and spending priorities, and on the impact of the 2019/2020 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 Cwm Taf Wellbeing 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 2019/2020 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 3.6%.

## **8.0 THE 2019/2020 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 5<sup>th</sup> of November 2018 to the 17<sup>th</sup> of December 2018 and over 4000 people were involved in the process, compared to 1500 last year, making this the largest response received in respect of our annual budget consultation process. The results of the consultation are attached at Appendix 5i. The consultation methods used this year included:

- An online Budget Simulator and questionnaire.
- A number of Town Centre, Leisure Centre and Library events.
- Promotion through Social media.
- Promotion of Leisure Centre events through 'Leisure for Life' app and Leisure social media pages.
- Questions/polls on social media.
- Two Young Person's Budget Engagement Events including Hawthorn Youth Club and a pilot session with Our Lady's RC Primary School.
- Older Persons Advisory Group Meeting.
- Disability Forum 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 £5.9M 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 2019/20 that was considered by Council on the 16<sup>th</sup> January 2019).

- 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 28<sup>th</sup> January 2019. Attached at Appendix 6 are the minutes (currently draft) from this meeting.

## **9.0 CONCLUSIONS**

- 9.1 On the 19<sup>th</sup> December 2018, the Minister for Housing and Local Government (Julie James AM) announced the Final 2019/2020 Local Government Settlement which showed this Council's increase in resources was set at 0.8%.
- 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. As detailed in the report, the use of such transitional funding would produce a balanced budget for 2019/2020.
- 9.3 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 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.

## **APPENDIX 2**

### **2019/2020 BUDGET AND COUNCIL TAX SETTING TIMETABLE**

#### **17<sup>th</sup> December 2018**

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

#### **19<sup>th</sup> December 2018**

Final Local Government Settlement - Receipt of final settlement figures

#### **28<sup>th</sup> January 2019**

**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.

#### **14<sup>th</sup> February, 2019**

**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

#### **6<sup>th</sup> March 2019**

**Council Meeting** – Cabinet to submit proposals to the Council for the 2019/2020 Budget Strategy and 2019/20 Council Tax levels

#### ***Council Decision required:***

Approve the 2019/2020 Revenue Budget.

Approve the 2019/2020 Council Tax.



## **WRITTEN STATEMENT BY THE WELSH GOVERNMENT**

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**Title**            **Final Local Government Settlement 2019-20**

**Date**            **19 December 2018**

**By**                **Julie James AM**  
**Minister for Housing and Local Government**

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 2019-20, setting out the allocations of core revenue funding for each of the 22 county and county borough councils in Wales. The Government has, again, ensured that Local Authorities in Wales are given detailed and firm information on their unhypothecated funding from Welsh Government as soon as possible to support them in planning their services and budgets.

In preparing the final settlement, careful consideration has been given to the responses received to the consultation on the provisional settlement, which closed on 20 November. This announcement provides councils with a robust basis for their financial planning for the coming financial year.

The decisions the Welsh Government has made as part of the overall budget provide local government with a realistic settlement against the background of the current financial climate and one which is improved on the indicative settlement approved in the last budget.

Compared with the provisional settlement announced in October, the final settlement, for 2019-20, includes an additional £23.6 million as a result of the Welsh Government's final budget allocations. This encompasses the additional allocations announced by the Welsh Government on 20 November, along with funding to increase the capital limit for residential care and to deliver local rates relief schemes.

The Welsh Government announcement on 20 November, provided for an additional £13 million for the local government settlement and a commitment to provide an extra £1.2 million of funding to deliver an improved settlement floor, so no authority faces a reduction of more than 0.5% in its core funding allocation over the current year.

As set out in the First Minister's letter to local authority Leaders, this improved package of funding must be matched by a commitment from local authorities to regional working, for example with health boards and the education consortia, to secure improved outcomes and increased resilience, and a re-commitment to the spirit and the letter of the terms and conditions of the Working Group on Local Government.

On 10 December, the Cabinet Secretary for Finance announced an extension of the high streets rate relief scheme in 2019-20, including £2.4m, allocated to local authorities through the local government settlement, to provide additional discretionary rates relief for local businesses and other ratepayers to respond to specific local issues.

The Government announced on 18 December a further increase from April 2019 in the amount of the capital people can keep without having to use this to pay for their residential care. This completes the final stage in the delivery of this Government's *Taking Wales Forward* commitment to raise the capital limit in charging for residential care to £50,000 two years ahead of schedule. In addition to the funding provided to date to local government for the previous increases in the limit for the capital limit, this local government settlement includes a further £7 million a year, recurrently, for this change.

These additional allocations mean the final settlement represents a cash increase overall, compared to 2018-19, equivalent to an increase of 0.2% after adjusting for transfers.

This additional funding means that I have been able to further revise the floor arrangements so that no authority now faces a reduction of more than 0.3%, compared with the current year, on a like-for-like basis. This arrangement is fully funded by the Welsh Government and ensures that the five authorities on the funding floor will benefit as a result of these additional allocations.

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.

Alongside the settlement, I am publishing the latest information we hold on Welsh Government grant schemes planned for 2019-20. This will assist local authorities in preparing their budgets for next year.

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 2019-20.

Local Authorities also need to invest in infrastructure and transformation. The budget announced yesterday provided for an additional £100m capital for local government in Wales, £50m in 2018-19, £30m in 2019-20 and £20m in 2020-21. This is in addition to the capital for highways refurbishment announced in the draft budget. As a result, capital funding for 2019-20 amounts to £541 million. Within this, General Capital Funding for 2019-20 will be £193 million (including £20 million for public highways refurbishment grant) and £183 million in 2020-21

The motion for the National Assembly for Wales to approve the Local Government Finance Report for 2019-20 is scheduled for debate on 15 January 2019.

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.

**Table 1: 2019-20 final settlement – comparison of the 2018-19 AEF including top-up funding (adjusted for transfers and tax-base changes) and the 2019-20 final AEF and top-up funding**

	<i>£000s</i>							
Unitary authority	2018-19 adjusted AEF plus top-up funding <sup>1</sup>	Of which top-up funding	2019-20 final AEF	2019-20 top-up funding	2019-20 final AEF plus top-up funding <sup>2</sup>	% change on adjusted 2018-19 AEF plus top-up funding	Rank	Council Tax Reduction Schemes (distributed within AEF)
Isle of Anglesey	96,079	0	95,522	269	95,791	-0.3%	18	5,131
Gwynedd	176,927	0	176,552	0	176,552	-0.2%	17	8,829
Conwy	154,656	39	153,501	691	154,192	-0.3%	18	9,030
Denbighshire	143,597	0	143,637	0	143,637	0.0%	10	9,000
Flintshire	189,549	0	188,444	537	188,980	-0.3%	18	9,578
Wrexham	175,360	0	175,252	0	175,252	-0.1%	14	9,489
Powys	174,815	0	173,077	1,214	174,291	-0.3%	18	8,208
Ceredigion	101,816	0	102,091	0	102,091	0.3%	8	5,001
Pembrokeshire	162,177	0	162,448	0	162,448	0.2%	9	7,385
Carmarthenshire	260,367	0	260,388	0	260,388	0.0%	11	14,165
Swansea	320,506	0	322,211	0	322,211	0.5%	7	19,081
Neath Port Talbot	213,240	0	214,796	0	214,796	0.7%	4	16,381
Bridgend	192,065	0	191,807	0	191,807	-0.1%	16	13,080
The Vale Of Glamorgan	152,271	0	152,070	0	152,070	-0.1%	15	9,050
Rhondda Cynon Taf	364,471	0	367,339	0	367,339	0.8%	3	21,681
Merthyr Tydfil	90,575	0	91,304	0	91,304	0.8%	2	5,690
Caerphilly	268,618	0	268,614	0	268,614	0.0%	12	13,021
Blaenau Gwent	110,835	717	110,815	0	110,815	0.0%	13	8,185
Torfaen	131,836	0	132,650	0	132,650	0.6%	5	8,116
Monmouthshire	93,510	51	92,470	759	93,229	-0.3%	18	5,702
Newport	213,035	0	214,343	0	214,343	0.6%	6	10,216
Cardiff	440,830	0	444,629	0	444,629	0.9%	1	27,979
<b>All Unitary Authorities</b>	<b>4,227,136</b>	<b>807</b>	<b>4,233,961</b>	<b>3,470</b>	<b>4,237,431</b>	<b>0.2%</b>		<b>244,000</b>

1. 2018-19 AEF adjusted for latest tax base, transfers of £13.069m into the Settlement and inclusive of £807 thousand of top-up funding provided in 2018-19.

2. 2019-20 Final AEF including £3.47 million thousand top-up funding.

## APPENDIX 4

### AVAILABLE REVENUE RESOURCES 2019/20 AND PROPOSED USAGE

	<b>£'000</b>
Total resources available in 2019/2020	483,355
<b>LESS:</b> Total resources available in 2018/2019	471,600
<b><u>INCREASE</u> in resources available in 2019/2020</b>	<b>11,755</b>

	<b>£'000</b>
<b>Allocation of Resources</b>	
Delegated Schools Budget *	2,700
Education & Inclusion Services	940
Community & Children's Services	6,787
Corporate and Frontline Services and Chief Executive's Division	2,553
Authority Wide Requirements	(1,225)
	<b>11,755</b>

\* - Delegated Schools Budget total increase of £5.2M less amount funded from one-off and passported resources of £2.5M

\*\* - The realignment of service areas, as set out in the 'Review of the Council's Senior and Associated Management Post Structure' update agreed by Cabinet on 24<sup>th</sup> January 2019 has not been reflected within this Appendix.

## **PROPOSED REVENUE BUDGET 2019/20**

### **Education & Inclusion Services**

#### **Delegated Schools Budgets**

	<b>£'000</b>
<b>Net Revenue Budget 2018/19</b>	<b>148,819</b>
Increase	5,200
Less amount funded from one-off and passported resources	(2,500)
<b>Proposed Net Revenue Budget 2019/20</b>	<b>151,519</b>

#### **Non Delegated Budgets**

	<b>£'000</b>
<b>Net Revenue Budget 2018/19</b>	<b>26,712</b>
Base and Inflationary Pressures	1,657
General Efficiencies	(701)
Other Cost Reduction Measures	(16)
<b>Proposed Net Revenue Budget 2019/20</b>	<b>27,652</b>

<b>Total Net Revenue Budget 2019/20</b>	<b>179,171</b>

## **Community & Children's Services**

	<b>£'000</b>
<b>Net Revenue Budget 2018/19</b>	<b>150,169</b>
Base and Inflationary Pressures	10,624
General Efficiencies	(2,796)
Other Cost Reduction Measures	(1,041)
<b>Proposed Net Revenue Budget 2019/20</b>	<b>156,956</b>

**Corporate and Frontline Services & Chief Executive's Division**

	<b>£'000</b>
<b>Net Revenue Budget 2018/19</b>	<b>76,325</b>
Base and Inflationary Pressures	6,199
General Efficiencies	(2,624)
Other Cost Reduction Measures	(1,022)
<b>Proposed Net Revenue Budget 2019/20</b>	<b>78,878</b>

**Authority Wide**

	<b>£'000</b>
<b>Net Revenue Budget 2018/19</b>	<b>69,575</b>
Increase / (Decrease)	(1,225)
<b>Proposed Net Revenue Budget 2019/20</b>	<b>68,350</b>
<b>Use of Reserves (Transition Funding)</b>	<b>-1,423</b>



Appendix 5i

## **Budget Consultation 2019/20**

*Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough  
Council*

*January 2019*



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- This section provides a summary of the main findings from the consultation.
- The purpose of the consultation was to seek views on the Council's budget for 2019/20, to support the decision making process, required to set the Council's budget for the coming financial year.
- The consultation was conducted in-house. The consultation period ran from the 5<sup>th</sup> November to the 17<sup>th</sup> December 2018.
- The following methods were used to consult with stakeholders;
  - An online Budget Simulator and questionnaire
  - A number of Town Centre, Leisure Centre and Library events
  - Promotion through Social media
  - Promotion of Leisure Centre events through 'Leisure for Life' app and Leisure social media pages.
  - Questions/polls on social media
  - Two Young Person's Budget Engagement Events including Hawthorn Youth Club and a pilot session with Our Lady's RC Primary School.
  - Older Persons Advisory Group Meeting
  - Disability Forum Meeting
  - Promotion with the Citizen's Panel.
- Over 4000 people were engaged in the consultation process.
- 245 responses were received to the online budget simulator with submitted budgets.
- The overall average budget was reduced by the 245 respondents who attempted to balance the budget. The average income increased by £2,277,780 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 £1,200,229 and the use of transitional funding of £1,077,600.
- The **top 10 services** that received the largest % decrease in average budget were;

Service Item	Average Change %
Music (Total Budget £129,000)	-1.34%
Cultural Services (Total Budget £946,000)	-1.25%
Support Services (Total Budget £26,881,000)	-1.24%

Waste (Black bags) (Total Budget £5,604,000)	-1.18%
Tourism & Heritage (Total Budget £742,000)	-1.11%
Customer Care (Total Budget £2,194,000)	-1.08%
Leisure (Total Budget £3,290,000)	-1.00%
Parks (Total Budget £4,860,000)	-0.95%
Libraries & Adult Learning (Total Budget £2,585,000)	-0.88%
Planning (Total Budget £796,000)	-0.87%

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

Service Item	Average Change %
<b>Schools (Total Budget £153,862,000)</b>	<b>-0.01%</b>
<b>Highways (Total Budget £7,781,000)</b>	<b>-0.16%</b>
<b>Children's Services (Total Budget £18,997,000)</b>	<b>-0.18%</b>
Homecare (Total Budget £22,618,000)	-0.27%
Children Looked After (Total Budget £27,241,000)	-0.27%
Apprenticeship Scheme (Total Budget £225,000)	-0.31%
Residential & Nursing Services (Total Budget £25,693,000)	-0.42%
Supported Accommodation (Total Budget £12,597,000)	-0.42%
Equipment and Adaptations (Total Budget £1,900,000)	-0.44%
Assessment Care Management (Total Budget £7,372,000)	-0.48%

- 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 £5.92m. Taking this into account the average % change increase in Council tax was reported to be 4.45%.
- A separate survey was provided online in addition to the Budget Simulator. 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 (74.8%).
- Respondents were asked what their preferred level of Council Tax increase for next year would be. The results show that 38.3% of respondents would prefer an increase of 3%, with 22.7% suggesting 5%. Only 13% suggested no increase.
- 61% of respondents said that the school budget should be protected and increased by £2.2m.
- Respondents were asked to state which services they would want to protect from an increase in fees and charges in 2019/20. School meals received the largest response with 122 comments.

Area to protect from an increase	No.
School Meals	122
Leisure Centre Membership	56
Sports Pitch Fees	50
Social / Elderly Care	38
Schools Transport / Afterschool Clubs	25
Meals on Wheels	21
Car Parking Fees	18

- The majority of respondents felt that the Council should focus on the key themes, especially Early Intervention and Prevention and Efficiency (87%)

	Yes (%)	No (%)	DK (%)
Digitalisation	64	24	12
Early Intervention and Prevention	87	7	6
Commercialisation	60	24	16
Efficiency	78	11	11
Independence	78	12	11

- 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 suggested, with the most support for Highways maintenance (87%), followed by Extra Care (78%).

	Yes (%)	No (%)	DK (%)
Extra Care	78	12	10
Traffic Management	75	17	8
Parks and Green Spaces	71	21	8
Regeneration of Town Centres	71	21	8
Improving Strategic Roads	63	27	10
Community Hubs	62	25	13
Modern Business Units	50	33	17
Highways maintenance	87	7	6
Bryn Pica Eco Park	68	20	12
Community Fund	53	26	21

- The face to face consultation discussions held in the town centres, leisure centres and libraries. Respondents were told about the investments that the Council proposed to make in 2019/20 and were asked to provide their views. The comments received are found in the main report.
- Residents were asked what level of Council Tax increase would be acceptable for the next financial year at the face to face events. 47% felt that a council tax increase of 3% would be acceptable.

C.Tax Increase	%
0%	30
1%	13
3%	47
5%	7
Over 5%	3

- Engagement took place with the Older Person Advisory Group (OPAG). The general consensus from all members of the OPAG was to increase Council Tax and protect services. The group discussed and went on to agree a 3% Council Tax increase, however after further discussion regarding the effect to services, the group agreed a final 4% Council Tax increase in order to close the budget gap further and protect more services.

The group discussed the council's priorities and agreed that Digitalisation and Early Intervention & Prevention were of particular importance for investment. When asked whether the group had any other ideas for investment, public toilets and pavements came to mind.

- An engagement session was also held with the Rhondda Cynon Taf Disability Forum. Most people agreed that a small increase in Council Tax to maintain services would be preferable than cutting services.  
*"Not clear enough what Council Tax is being used for."*

When asked if they agreed that it was reasonable to increase the Schools budget all members of the group agreed however there were some comments that this money won't make a significant difference to schools and concerns about how this money would be divided.

The group were asked for their views on fees and charges with most agreeing that these should not be increased and frozen at their current levels or even decreased.

- An engagement event was held with Hawthorn Youth Club. The results show that the young people agreed with most of the priorities with the exception of 'Efficiency'. All young people present agreed that investing in community groups was an important priority with this being the only area that prompted full agreement. Of high importance were improvements to parks and green spaces and to Community Hubs. Those with the lowest levels of support were Highways and Roads and improving road traffic.

# **1. INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 This report presents the findings of the General Budget Strategy Consultation for 2019/20, 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 road show events and the Older Persons Advisory Group and Disability Forum meeting.
- 1.6 Section 7 provides some feedback on the young persons' engagement events.
- 1.7 Section 8 provides the results of Social Media polls and some comments.

## **2. BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 For the financial year 2019/20 the Council must decide upon its Budget Strategy and priorities.
- 2.2 The Council faces an initial budget gap of £5.92M for 2019/20, 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 31<sup>st</sup> March 2020.
- 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 5<sup>th</sup> November to the 17<sup>th</sup> December 2018.

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

3.1 The Council's budget consultation ran from 5<sup>th</sup> November to the 17<sup>th</sup> December 2018.

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 and questionnaire
- A number of Town Centre, Leisure Centre and Library events
- Promotion through Social media
- Promotion of Leisure Centre events through 'Leisure for Life' app and Leisure social media pages.
- Questions/polls on social media
- Two Young Person's Budget Engagement Events including Hawthorn Youth Club and a pilot session with Our Lady's RC Primary School.
- Older Persons Advisory Group Meeting
- Disability Forum 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 £5.92m 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;

#### Town Centre Roadshows

DATE	Detail/Events
Friday 16th November	Mountain Ash
Friday 23 <sup>rd</sup> November	Tonypanyd
Wednesday 28th November	Pontypridd

#### Libraries

DATE	Detail/Events
Monday 12th November	Treorchy
Friday 30 <sup>th</sup> November	Abercynon
Tuesday 4 <sup>th</sup> December	Aberdare
Wednesday 5 <sup>th</sup> December	Pontyclun
Friday 7 <sup>th</sup> December	Ferndale
Tuesday 11 <sup>th</sup> December	Porth
Tuesday 11 <sup>th</sup> December	Hirwaun
Thursday 13 <sup>th</sup> December	Pontypridd

#### Leisure Centres

DATE	Detail/Events
Thursday 15 <sup>th</sup> November	Llantrisant Leisure Centre
Monday 19 <sup>th</sup> November	Sobell Leisure Centre
Tuesday 22 <sup>nd</sup> November	Hawthorn Leisure Centre
Monday 26 <sup>th</sup> November	Rhondda Sports 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 Hawthorn Youth Club discussed the budget through interactive keypads and a discussion led by a YEPS officer.
- 3.8 An engagement session was held with 15 Year 6 pupils at Our Lady's RC Primary School with the discussion led by Consultation team members.
- 3.9 Discussions were also held with a meeting of the Older Persons' Advisory Group (OPAG) on the 28<sup>th</sup> November 2018 and the Disability Forum on the 14<sup>th</sup> December 2018.
- 3.10 Over 4000 people were engaged in the budget setting process.

## 4 BUDGET SIMULATOR RESULTS

### Responses received

- 4.1 245 responses were received with submitted budgets. In addition, 1192 people viewed the simulator, whilst not necessarily completing and submitting a budget (google analytics data).

### The Overall Budget

- 4.2 As can be seen below the overall average budget was reduced by the 245 respondents who attempted to balance the budget. The average income increased by £2,277,780 and the average revised expenditure put forward showed a decrease of £1,242,451.

Original Total Income	£ 85,600,000
Original Total Expenditure	£ 401,350,000
Average Revised Total Income	£ 87,877,780
Average Revised Total Expenditure	£ 399,908,631

**Table 1 – The Overall Budget**

### **Overall Summary of Services**

- 4.3 The table overleaf shows the average percentage change of all service areas included in the simulator. All service areas received a reduction in their budget. A summary of the services with the highest and lowest decrease are shown on the next page.

<b>Education and Skill (Expenditure)</b>	
Schools (Total Budget £153,862,000)	-0.01%
School Support Services (Total Budget £12,394,000)	-0.49%
Libraries & Adult Learning (Total Budget £2,585,000)	-0.88%
Apprenticeship Scheme (Total Budget £225,000)	-0.31%
Youth Provision (Total Budget £2,087,000)	-0.57%
Access, Engagement & Inclusion (Total £9,146,000)	-0.74%
<b>Adult Social Care</b>	
Assessment Care Management (Total Budget £7,372,000)	-0.48%
Residential & Nursing Services (Total Budget £25,693,000)	-0.42%
Supported Accommodation (Total Budget £12,597,000)	-0.42%
Homecare (Total Budget £22,618,000)	-0.27%
Day Care Services (Total Budget £6,697,000)	-0.65%
Equipment and Adaptations (Total Budget £1,900,000)	-0.44%
Care Support & Other Services (Total Budget £6,075,000)	-0.51%
<b>Children's Services and Wellbeing</b>	
Children's Services (Total Budget £18,997,000)	-0.18%
Children Looked After (Total Budget £27,241,000)	-0.27%
Public Health (Total Budget £4,753,000)	-0.65%
Housing (Total Budget £1,476,000)	-0.66%
Parks (Total Budget £4,860,000)	-0.95%
<b>Frontline Services</b>	
Highways (Total Budget £7,781,000)	-0.16%
Streetcare (Total Budget £4,621,000)	-0.71%
Recycling (Total Budget £11,591,000)	-0.53%
Waste (Black bags) (Total Budget £5,604,000)	-1.18%
Transport (Total Budget £14,663,000)	-0.85%
Customer Care (Total Budget £2,194,000)	-1.08%
Support Services (Total Budget £26,881,000)	-1.24%
<b>Leisure, Culture and Regeneration</b>	
Tourism & Heritage (Total Budget £742,000)	-1.11%
Cultural Services (Total Budget £946,000)	-1.25%
Planning (Total Budget £796,000)	-0.87%
Regeneration (Total Budget £1,534,000)	-0.74%
Leisure (Total Budget £3,290,000)	-1.00%
Music (Total Budget £129,000)	-1.34%

Table 2 – Overall Summary of Services

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

Service Item	Average Change %
<b>Music (Total Budget £129,000)</b>	<b>-1.34%</b>
<b>Cultural Services (Total Budget £946,000)</b>	<b>-1.25%</b>
<b>Support Services (Total Budget £26,881,000)</b>	<b>-1.24%</b>
Waste (Black bags) (Total Budget £5,604,000)	-1.18%
Tourism & Heritage (Total Budget £742,000)	-1.11%
Customer Care (Total Budget £2,194,000)	-1.08%
Leisure (Total Budget £3,290,000)	-1.00%
Parks (Total Budget £4,860,000)	-0.95%
Libraries & Adult Learning (Total Budget £2,585,000)	-0.88%
Planning (Total Budget £796,000)	-0.87%

**Table 3: Services receiving largest % decrease in average budget**

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

Service Item	Average Change %
<b>Schools (Total Budget £153,862,000)</b>	<b>-0.01%</b>
<b>Highways (Total Budget £7,781,000)</b>	<b>-0.16%</b>
<b>Children's Services (Total Budget £18,997,000)</b>	<b>-0.18%</b>
Homecare (Total Budget £22,618,000)	-0.27%
Children Looked After (Total Budget £27,241,000)	-0.27%
Apprenticeship Scheme (Total Budget £225,000)	-0.31%
Residential & Nursing Services (Total Budget £25,693,000)	-0.42%
Supported Accommodation (Total Budget £12,597,000)	-0.42%
Equipment and Adaptations (Total Budget £1,900,000)	-0.44%
Assessment Care Management (Total Budget £7,372,000)	-0.48%

**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 -0.10%, the reductions vary from -0.88% for Libraries and Adult learning to only -0.01% for schools.

Education and Skills (Expenditure)		-0.10%
Schools (Total Budget £153,862,000)		-0.01%
School Support Services (Total Budget £12,394,000)		-0.49%
Libraries & Adult Learning (Total Budget £2,585,000)		-0.88%
Apprenticeship Scheme (Total Budget £225,000)		-0.31%
Youth Provision (Total Budget £2,087,000)		-0.57%
Access, Engagement & Inclusion (Total £9,146,000)		-0.74%

**Table 5: Average change % for Education and Skills**

#### Education and Skills Comments

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

#### Overall

*“Education is crucial in the fight against discrimination, unemployment and indifference. I would urge whoever it may concern to protect education services at all costs.”*

*“Providing our young people with a good education I believe is the most important function of the Council.”*

*“Education services must be protected and grown. The children are our future.”*

*“Education needs to do its part in making the savings, you cannot expect other areas to continually make savings without do your share”*

#### Schools

*“The super schools seemed to be the way forward in wider long term reductions.”*

*“Schools budgets have been protected for some time at the expense of other service sectors. As many local schools continue to merge, operational costs should reduce, and the authority can recoup additional revenue through the sale of disused sites. Schools have a colossal share*

*of the Council budget, and it seems reasonable to argue that their money could be spent more effectively.....”*

### Schools Support

*“Schools and support services are now clearly struggling to meet the needs of all children and young people, particularly those with additional learning needs. Spend now to save later.”*

### Libraries & Adult Learning

*“Books can now be viewed online”*

*“Libraries are essential community hubs, often stepping in where other community facilities are lost. They are particularly important given the introduction of Universal Credit (giving claimants access to PCs) and should be preserved and enhanced”*

### Apprenticeship Scheme

*“Apprenticeships are very important and should be enhanced where possible.”*

*“Research suggests that apprenticeships can add a significant return on investment.”*

### Youth Provision

*“I feel that there are few opportunities for young people to gain employment & training, or have access to good role models e.g. youth clubs, which means that little feeling of self-worth or purpose in life, which can only increase anti-social behaviour”*

### Access, Engagement & Inclusion

*“There are many sector agencies delivering projects for youth provision, access, engagement and Inclusion.”*

## Adult Social Care

- 4.8 The Adult Social Care budget was reduced on average by -0.41%, the reductions vary from -0.65% for Day Care Services to -0.27% for homecare.

<b>Adult Social Care (Expenditure)</b>		<b>-0.41%</b>
Assessment Care Management (Total Budget £7,372,000)		-0.48%
Residential & Nursing Services (Total Budget £25,693,000)		-0.42%
Supported Accommodation (Total Budget £12,597,000)		-0.42%
Homecare (Total Budget £22,618,000)		-0.27%
Day Care Services (Total Budget £6,697,000)		-0.65%
Equipment and Adaptations (Total Budget £1,900,000)		-0.44%
Care Support & Other Services (Total Budget £6,075,000)		-0.51%

**Table 6: Average change % for Adult Social Care**

### Adult and Social Care comments

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

#### Overall

*"I am sure that there is room for savings in the management structure of adult social care."*

*"Families should be encouraged to look after their relatives a lot more as it stands now."*

*"It's important to protect the vulnerable."*

*"As stated previously, these are important departments that have experienced cuts previously. They help our most vulnerable residents and should not be cut again."*

*"I believe that much of the costs should be fronted by families for care for their loved ones rather than the council. I believe the council should offer discounted services and support but I don't think it's the council's place to bare all costs."*

*"Greater efficiencies to be had with integration between health and adult social care."*

Equipment & Adaptations

*“Increase in equipment and adaptations may allow for substantial amounts of money to be saved on care packages.”*

*“Most people receiving equipment and adaptations are in receipt of disability allowance. This should be used for what they need. It's what it's there for.”*

**Children's Services and Wellbeing**

- 4.10 The Children's Services and Wellbeing budget was reduced on average by 0.34%, the reductions vary from -0.95% for Parks to 0.18% for Children's Services.

<b>Children's Services and Wellbeing (Expenditure)</b>		<b>-0.34%</b>
Children's Services (Total Budget £18,997,000)		-0.18%
Children Looked After (Total Budget £27,241,000)		-0.27%
Public Health (Total Budget £4,753,000)		-0.65%
Housing (Total Budget £1,476,000)		-0.66%
Parks (Total Budget £4,860,000)		-0.95%

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

Children's Services and Wellbeing comments

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

Looked After Children

*“Services for the most vulnerable residents should be protected and enhanced where possible”*

*“Reduce expensive out of county placements. Integrate with health and education”*

Housing

*“Empty properties either sold or homeless people could live in them”*

Parks

*“Make use of volunteers to help maintain Parks and open spaces”*

*“What about transferring some of the parks to voluntary groups who could access grants etc.”*

*“Parks could be maintained by volunteers from the local area and managed more effectively.”*

*“Parks - community service offenders to clean up park areas and upkeep buildings such as painting. Housing - also they could be used in this area too.”*

### **Frontline Services**

- 4.12 The Frontline Services budget was reduced on average by -0.89%, the reductions vary from -1.24% for Support Services to a decrease of 0.16% for Highways.

<b>Frontline Services (Expenditure)</b>		<b>-0.89%</b>
Highways (Total Budget £7,781,000)		-0.16%
Streetcare (Total Budget £4,621,000)		-0.71%
Recycling (Total Budget £11,591,000)		-0.53%
Waste (Black bags) (Total Budget £5,604,000)		-1.18%
Transport (Total Budget £14,663,000)		-0.85%
Customer Care (Total Budget £2,194,000)		-1.08%
Support Services (Total Budget £26,881,000)		-1.24%

**Table 8: Average change % for Frontline Services**

#### Frontline Services comments

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

#### Highways

*“We spend an awful lot on roads as it stands compared to other authorities”*

*“RCT's highway network needs improvement, and additional funding should be sourced where possible.”*

#### Streetcare

*“All street lighting should be low cost LED”*

#### Recycling

*“Our recycling system is one of the best in Wales, and I do not believe rates would fall with modest reductions to the Waste Management budget.”*

Waste

*“More education from the recycling to reduce black bags even further or a monthly collection of black bags.”*

*“Education on black bag use can be reduced. The fact this is reduced will not cut the amount of people who already recycle.”*

Transport

*“Investing in public transport is also essential, as it helps to reduce the county's carbon footprint, and provides a vital link for the poorest residents, who often cannot drive”*

Customer Care

*“Better online services would reduce the reasons for calling, often you use the online functions and you don't get a response so results in Phoning”*

Support Services

*“Administrative services should be cut with responsibilities handed back to front line departments where appropriate.”*

*“Reduce the amount of department heads to allow the savings to be made”*

**Leisure Culture and Regeneration**

- 4.14 The Leisure, Culture and Regeneration budget was reduced on average by -0.98%, the reductions vary from -1.34% for Music to -0.74% for Regeneration.

<b>Leisure, Culture and Regeneration (Expenditure)</b>		<b>-0.98%</b>
Tourism & Heritage (Total Budget £742,000)		-1.11%
Cultural Services (Total Budget £946,000)		-1.25%
Planning (Total Budget £796,000)		-0.87%
Regeneration (Total Budget £1,534,000)		-0.74%
Leisure (Total Budget £3,290,000)		-1.00%
Music (Total Budget £129,000)		-1.34%

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

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

Tourism & Heritage

*“Tourism and Heritage could charge fee to make this heading sustainable in the future.”*

*“Tourism could be reduced and promoted through FB and other sources”*

Leisure

*“Make more use of volunteers in providing leisure services”*

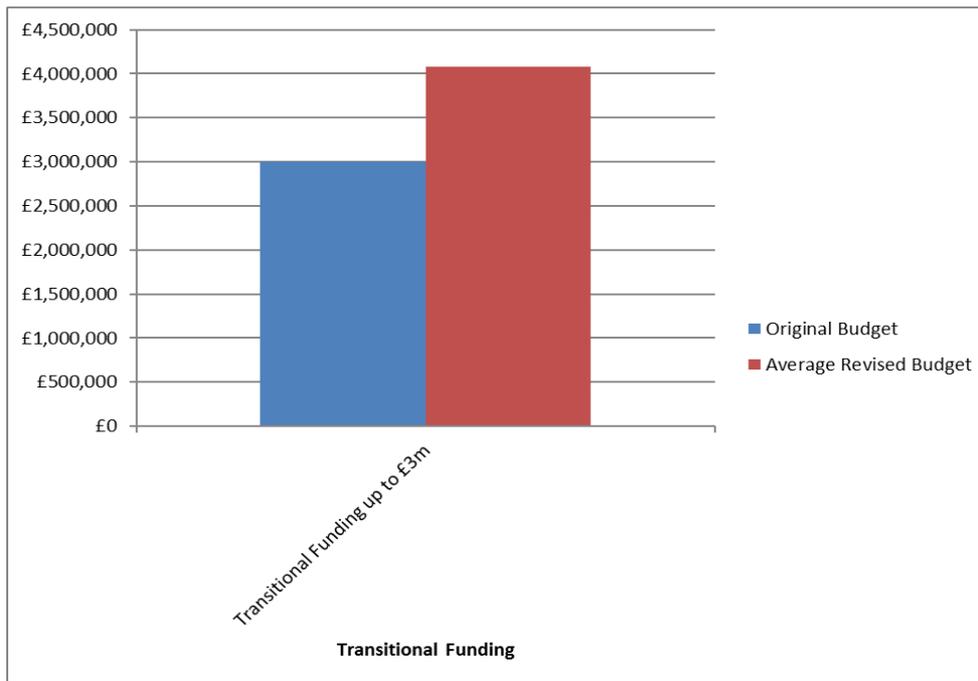
*“There are several leisure facilities across the county that could be closed or handed over to a private/ not for profit consortium. Whilst maintaining public health is essential, the Council could work with existing private providers and the health service more effectively”*

Music

*“As the British Economy has a lot of income from the Music and Entertainment business it is short sighted of us not to invest in it.”*

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 £3M available. The average percentage change suggested was an increase of 35.92% which would result in using additional transitional funding of £1,077,600.



**Figure 1 - Transitional Funding**

### Comments on Transitional Funding

- 4.17 The following are a selection of comments received on transitional funding;

*“All measures should be taken to reduce the impact on front line services. If the Council has to apply for additional funding, or use money from its reserves, then so be it.”*

*“Investment in some of the initiatives now may allow for greater savings in the long run.”*

*“If this payment is only a one off then may be it should not be used yet as with Brexit, the future may be more uncertain”*

*“Transitional funding for this year, these sectors will save money next year to plug the gap.”*

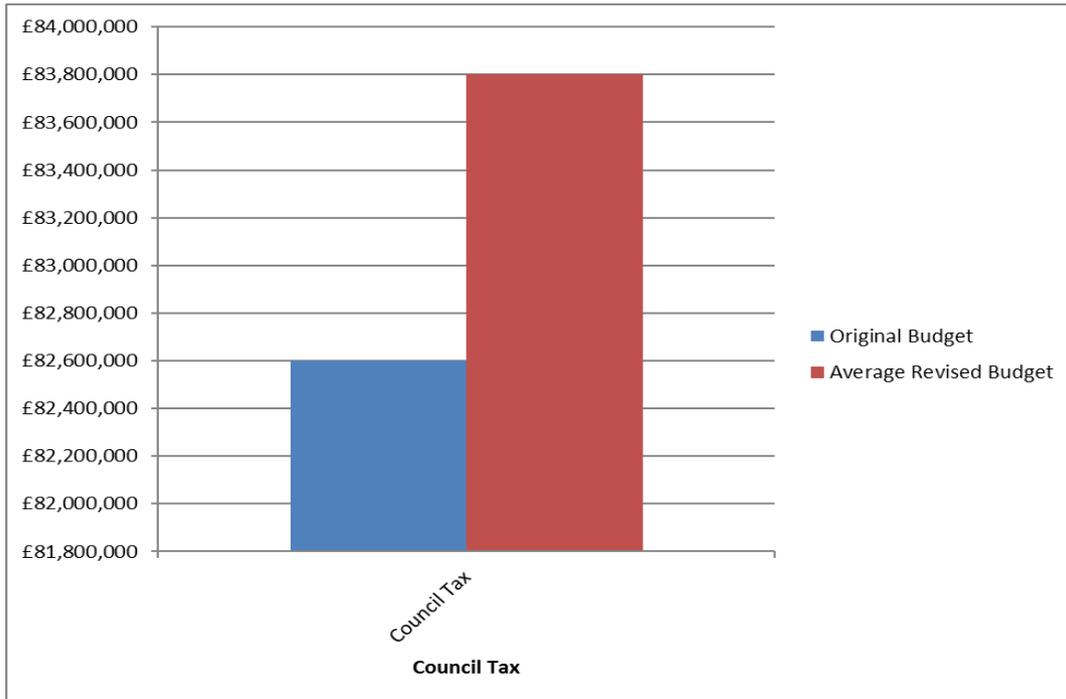
### Council Tax

- 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 £5.92m. Taking this into account the average % change increase in Council tax was reported to be 4.45%.

	Average Change %
	1.45%
Taking account of 3% used for modelling purposes	4.45%

**Table 10: Average change % for Council Tax**

4.19 The following figure shows that the extra income generated from Council Tax (based on the above level of increase) would be £1,200,229.



**Figure 2 - Level of Council Tax increase**

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;

*“I would rather pay a little extra and save our services.”*

*“Happy to pay for to protect front line services”*

*“I think most people would accept a modest increase in Council tax if it protects local services.”*

*“If we want good services then they must be paid for somehow”*

3% and under

*"I live in RCT and would be prepared to pay an additional 3% on my council tax"*

*"Whilst, as a resident, I am loathed to suggest an increase in Council tax, a small 1% increase may be necessary to balance the budget."*

Over 3%

*"Please keep the increase to under 5%"*

*"Go for the maximum, Ensure tax is collected on all vacant properties and land-banked sites."*

*"4% max rise in council tax"*

*"4% is fair I think"*

*"A council tax of 5% would be the most it should"*

No increase

*"People struggle to pay this as is stands."*

*"Council tax should not be raised again. You can't keep pushing the burden onto hard-pressed households."*

*"Whilst I appreciate that Council tax has to increase to help support service I feel that the council also needs to be mindful that all bills are increasing e.g. good, fuel, heating etc. but wages are not"*

*"We are struggling to pay the current charges let alone any increase"*

General Comments

- 4.21 Respondents were given the opportunity to provide general comments in relation to the budget, these included:

*"Can see how increasing pressures are going to make it harder to balance the budget in future years Invest in our future. Without quality education the valleys are doomed to stay in the poverty cycle, further exasperated by austerity."*

*"The Council provides vital services for the most vulnerable in our community as well as educating our children and looking after our environment and it is very sad and worrying to see these services being adversely affected because of budget cuts."*

*“It’s pretty easy, simply have a small increase in council tax and cut everything equally and lose anything that is not statutory.”*

*“Schools and social care should be the priority”*

*“Sometimes you need to spend it to save it in the long term. If invested more into the highways department helping to maintain roads like potholes and so on. Less people would be claiming for damaged vehicles (and likely reduce fraudulent claims also).....”*

*“We need a society where those who can afford to pay a little more are willing to do so for the greater good of all”*

*“Senior management structure still top-heavy; too many people being paid for doing too little. Previous management reductions now all undone.”*

*“The only other cost cutting would be to reduce management or cut wages.”*

*“More funding for schools is needed to avoid cuts to classrooms, also a council tax rise of 4% or under is reasonable to avoid bigger cuts”*

## 5 Questionnaire Results

- 5.1 A separate survey was provided online in addition to the Budget Simulator, the results of which are summarised in this section.

### Council Tax

- 5.2 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 (74.8%).

Base	246
<b>Q1 Every 1% rise in Council Tax provides the Council with additional revenue of £826,000. With a £5.92M budget gap for 2019/20, should the Council...</b>	
Maintain as many services at the current level as possible even if it means a reasonable increase in Council Tax to contribute towards closing the budget gap?	74.8%
Cut services to close the budget gap and keep any increase in Council Tax to a minimum?	25.2%

**Table 11: Preferred option to maintain / cut services with effect on Council Tax**

A selection of comments can be found below;

#### Agree to maintain services and increase Council Tax

*“A reasonable rise.”*

*“As a resident, I would prefer to see a reasonable rise in Council Tax in order to protect services and staff.”*

*“Balance a small rise of under 5% against having to make more cuts”*

*“Happy to increase council tax to maintain/improve services”*

*“I’m happy to have this increased, we need to maintain our services for the elderly and our youth. I am proud of where I live and the frontline services they help towards the cleanliness of our streets, parks and communities. If you travel to other Authorities around us there is a big difference in the way their towns are cleaned.....”*

*“Services are getting more expensive. Wages and the minimum wage has increased, all these have to be covered”*

*“Small increase is acceptable but not 8% and 10% like some councils are suggesting”*

No increase in Council Tax

*“Hard working tax payers have been hit the hardest over the last 10yrs. Why should they pay more council tax.....”*

*“People struggle to pay council tax at its current level. Not everyone uses services provided by the council but are expected to pay for them through council tax.”*

A balance of maintain and cuts

*“A mixture of increase council tax and cuts in services.”*

*“Maintain essential services but consider cuts to services which have been receiving funding for a long period with poor returns for the funding.”*

*Minimum raise in Council Tax (1%) will allow some funds to be raised and offset some cuts although others will still be necessary”*

*“There needs to be a balance between the raising of Council tax and what services are run”*

Neither options

*“Neither of the two options are appropriate. My third option - Maintain and improve existing services. Seek alternative forms of income rather than increase council tax again”*

*“Not an option for neither or other. Cutting off some services again isn't the answer or increasing tax. Look at what's wrong with current services. Fix those.”*

*“Not really giving a choice in this, services have been cut already and what you think is a 'Reasonable Increase' to council tax isn't the same as what the general public think. Cut some of your own outlays first (sell assets, cut your overheads and review salaries for high earners - you're the council, not the government).”*

*“We already pay huge amounts in council tax. Cutting services need not be the whole answer, instead efficiencies can be made across the board using innovative and realistic ideas”*

Other

*“I feel that there are services run by the Council that do not run as well or as efficiently as they could do. The concern is that services are cut that affect people adversely”*

*“I know that you try your best..... and you do a blinking good job!”*

*“I still feel all council services could be streamlined in order to save money without affecting performance.””*

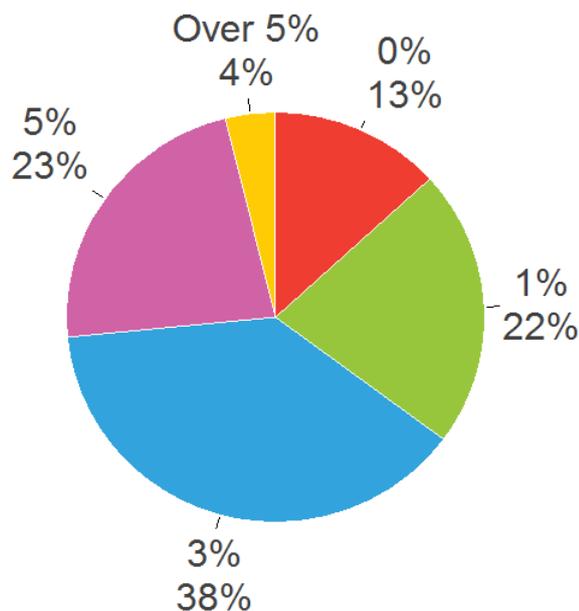
*I feel that the council is putting too much emphasis on everything being online e.g. book appointment for car badge, refuse collection etc., but not everyone has access to a computer, and I feel that the public actually prefer to speak to a person”*

*“Or work on making services more efficient without cutting front line staff. Maybe we could consider the wages of directors?”*

**Preferred Level of Council Tax**

5.3 Respondents were asked what their preferred level of Council Tax increase for next year would be. The results show that 38.3% of respondents would prefer an increase of 3%, with 22.7% suggesting 5%. Only 13% suggested no increase.

**Q2 What would be your preferred level of Council Tax increase for next year?**

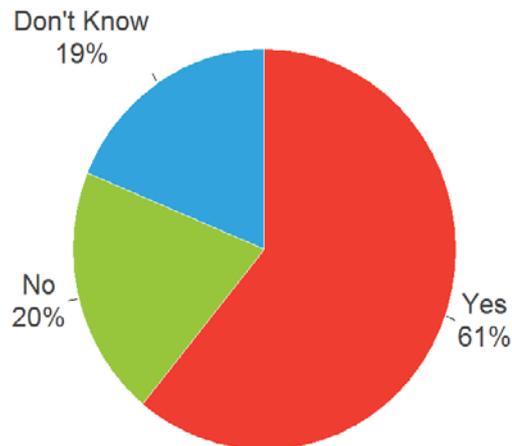


**Figure 3 - Preferred level of Council Tax increase**

### **Schools Budget**

- 5.4 61% of respondents said that the school budget should be protected and increased by £2.2m.

#### **Q3 Do you think that this increase is reasonable for schools?**



**Figure 4 - Agreement with Schools Budget increase**

### **Fees and Charges**

- 5.5 Respondents were asked to state which services they would want to protect from an increase in fees and charges in 2019/20. School meals received the largest response with 122 comments suggesting that they should be protected from an increase in charge.

<b>Area to protect from an increase</b>	<b>No.</b>
School Meals	122
Leisure Centre Membership	56
Sports Pitch Fees	50
Social / Elderly Care	38
Schools Transport / Afterschool Clubs	25
Meals on Wheels	21
Car Parking Fees	18
Buses / Public Transport	8
Libraries	7
Business Rates	6
Council Tax	5

**Table 12: Areas to protect from increase**

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

Any Other Comments on the budget?

Council Tax

*"Council tax increase of 4% to 5% at max"*

*"I'd support a council tax rise under 5% if it supports services and avoids cuts"*

*"Limit council tax rises to inflation or just over to maintain services"*

Services to protect/prioritise

*"Protection for social care and school should be priority"*

*"Front line social care should be protected"*

*"More funding for schools and social care"*

*"Not sure if £2.2m extra for schools is enough but they should be a priority"*

*"If you receive an uplift in your settlement I think it should be used for social care. I also think it is important to maintain leisure services to improve the health of the citizens"*

*"Mental Health is rising, as well as homelessness, can more money be found in the budget to tackle these issues?"*

Budget Suggestions

*"Breakfast clubs should be means tested".*

*"Charge for Blue Badges £10- other authorities do!"*

*"we need to charge for bin bags and no non-statutory service should be free, even if there is a nominal charge of 50p. No one values services that are free"*

Fees and Charges

*"I don't think you should cap the leisure centre membership as if they can afford that then they are able to pay the increase in fees."*

*"I suppose it's got to be leisure centre membership, you can't really increase charges for school meals"*

Staff/Councillor efficiencies

*"Cut the wages of top council leaders to reflect the cuts to residents."*

*“Expenses of councillors needs to be reduced.....”*

#### Other Efficiencies

*“Cut back office waste more”*

#### Other

*“I think that the council should be doing all that it can to promote sports and leisure activities throughout RCT”*

*“Over all the council does well compared to the budget cuts it has had in recent years. Roads here are much better maintained than other council areas....”*

*“Shouldn't waste money on Welsh language first translation, when other services are suffering.”*

### **The Council's Priorities**

5.7 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

5.8 To support the delivery of the 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.

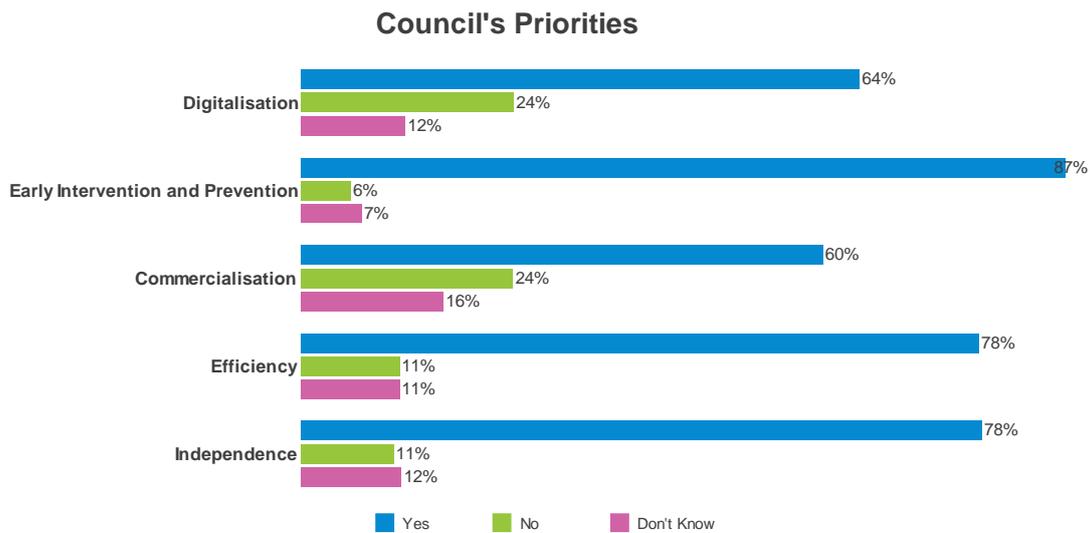
- **Digitalisation** – making services by creating an agile workforce and increasing opportunities for residents to interact with us online
- **Early Intervention and Prevention** – invest in services which allow us to solve issues before they escalate
- **Commercialisation** – offer some of our services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

5.9 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 (87%).

	Yes (%)	No (%)	Don't know (%)
Digitalisation	64	24	12
Early Intervention and Prevention	87	7	6
Commercialisation	60	24	16
Efficiency	78	11	11
Independence	78	12	11

**Table 13: Key areas of focus**

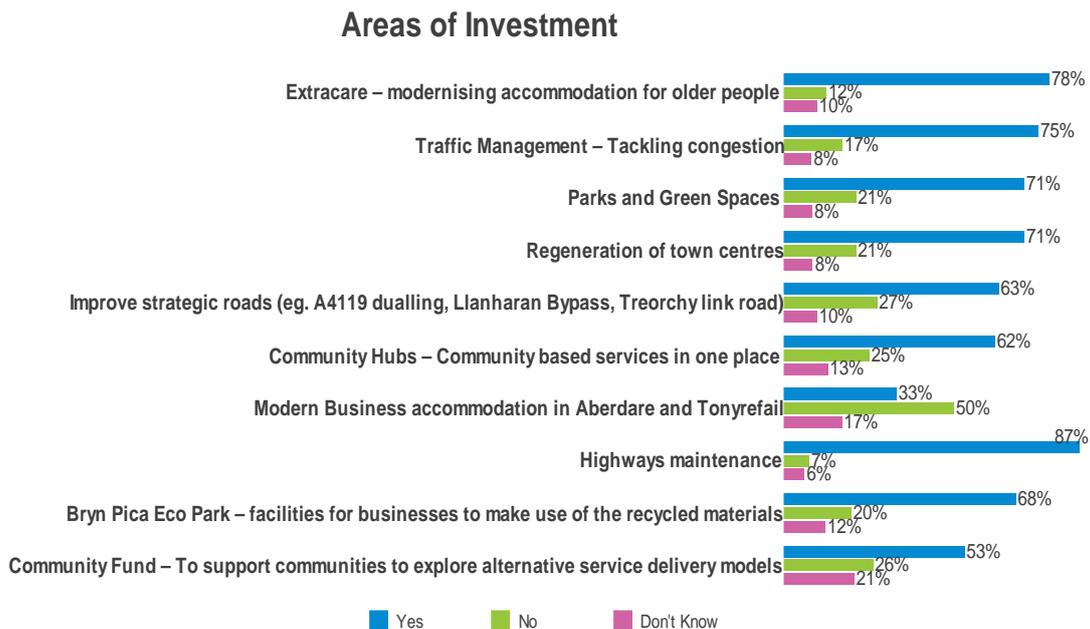


**Figure 5 - Agreement with focus on 5 key areas**

5.10 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 Highways maintenance (87%), followed by Extra Care (78%).

	Yes (%)	No (%)	Don't know (%)
Extra Care	78	12	10
Traffic Management	75	17	8
Parks and Green Spaces	71	21	8
Regeneration of Town Centres	71	21	8
Improving Strategic Roads	63	27	10
Community Hubs	62	25	13
Modern Business Units	50	33	17
Highways maintenance	87	7	6
Bryn Pica Eco Park	68	20	12
Community Fund	53	26	21

**Table 14: Areas of Investment**



**Figure 6 - Agreement with areas of Investment**

5.11 The following are a selection of comments received on the Council's investment areas;

Extra Care

*“We should invest in the modernising accommodation for older people - we are living longer but unfortunately ill health affects nearly all of us - so support should be put in place.”*

### Traffic Management

*“Re: Modern Business accommodation in Aberdare and Tonyrefail You need to sort out infrastructure first - improve roads, parking and congestion”*

*“Traffic is a huge problem in the valleys as these road were not built for this type of heavy use.”*

*“Traffic management should focus on reduction and alternatives.”*

### Parks and Green Spaces

*“Parks and play areas should fund raise funds to assist with their maintainability”*

*“Providing places for outdoor activities, such as walking, cycling is beneficial to people's health and wellbeing. Investing in Bryn Pica will help our environment and reduce waste and pollution.”*

*“Park and Green Spaces looking after these areas helps our well being”*

### Regeneration of Town Centres

*“I do understand how difficult it is to regenerate town centres, they seem to be becoming a thing of the past which is sad. Due to online shopping and out of town stores our town centres have suffered badly. I think a great help would have been to transfer some Council offices into towns.....”*

*“Regeneration of our towns risks pouring money down a hole unless a new role can be found for our high streets.”*

### Improving Strategic Roads

*“I feel that road improvements should be high priority as so many residents have to travel further afield for their jobs as there is so little opportunity in the Valleys for employment. “*

*“Whilst infrastructure improvements are required, particularly in conjunction with new houses; people should be encouraged onto public transport. Money should not be spent easing congestion in sustainable places where public transport can be utilised to get from A to B.”*

### Community Hubs

*“Community Hubs in one building will cut costs in maintaining and heating many buildings in the same area.”*

### Modern Business Units

*“Great idea to bring business accommodation in but unless we address these in line with our road infrastructure businesses will not set up in RCT.”*

### Highways maintenance

*“Highways maintenance should be a high priority”*

*“Highway maintenance is essential due to our climate and the damage it causes to our roads”*

### Bryn Pica Eco Park

*“Need to have sound business cases for Eco Park - if it has to be subsidised then no real point. Has to be treated as a commercial enterprise if business are going to be involved.”*

*“Make the green waste you produce and collect into a viable compost for residents to have purchase at cost”*

*“Eco Park is the way forward recycling materials is the way forward”*

### Community Fund

*“Community Fund – To support communities to explore alternative service delivery models-This may be a way forward but would need close monitoring to ensure the money is not swallowed up in admin and staffing”*

- 5.12 Respondents were asked if there were any other service areas/facilities or infrastructure that they felt needed further investment, the following are a selection of responses received;

### Community/Road Safety

*“A bigger investment on community safety services to ensure the people of RCT feel safe in their communities”*

*“More cctv to stop vandalism saving money long term on repairs”.*

*“Casualty reduction on roads with road safety campaigns. More traffic enforcement to prevent the ever increasing antisocial to dangerous driving. More police on our streets.”*

### Parks and Open spaces

*“A closer partnership with NRW would enable joined up investment and improvement of green spaces”*

Older People/social care

*“Anything to service most in need such as elderly and disabled.”*

*“Care homes for the elderly and extra care facilities.”*

*“Care to support the elderly as their needs change and become greater, completely inadequate and overwhelmed by demand.”*

Young people/services

*“community projects for young people - as we have no youth centres now in the valleys”*

*“Investment in Children's Residential Services as we have too many children and young people living out of county, due to lack of suitable provision within the authority”*

*“Youth facilities - more youth clubs”*

Mental Health services

*“Mental health need all the investment it can possibly get and more”.*

*“Mental health services, specifically under 18's.”*

Leisure/play

*“Continue to invest in indoor/outdoor fitness and leisure and children's play areas.”*

Libraries

*“Libraries, they are vital to the community”*

Schools/Education

*“Education and school buildings keep up the investment, need to invest in our future.”*

*“Cwmdare and Comin / Park must have new schools, merging the two may well be the best way to go”*

*“I think some investment is needed in our Welsh medium schools, especially in the Rhondda. Many English schools seem to be benefitting from investment around RCT.”*

*“Special educational needs. Ensuring these children get the best chance not just adequate.”*

Environmental Services

*“Flooding”*

*“More money for flood prevention”*

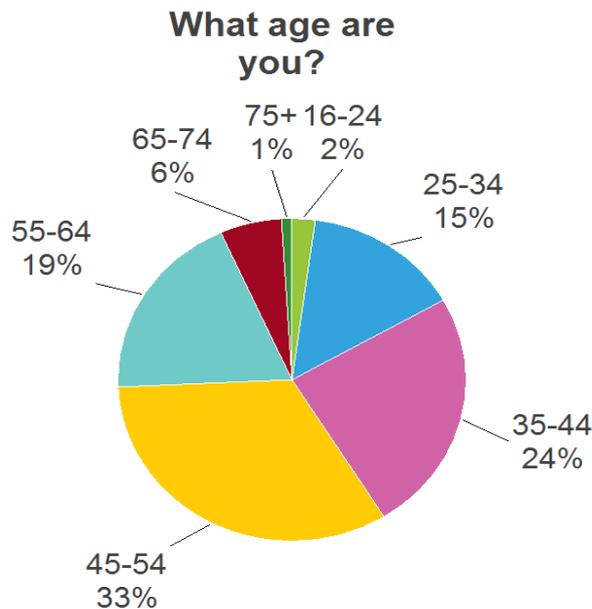
*“Investment in charging points for e vehicles for council staff and the public use of e vehicles for all council staff”*

Commercialisation

*“Too much emphasis on provision of services, if services were more proactive in making money this cut offset cuts elsewhere. Council needs to be better at "selling" e.g. council run MOT centres, businesses buying services from the Council i.e. HR, Occ Health etc.”*

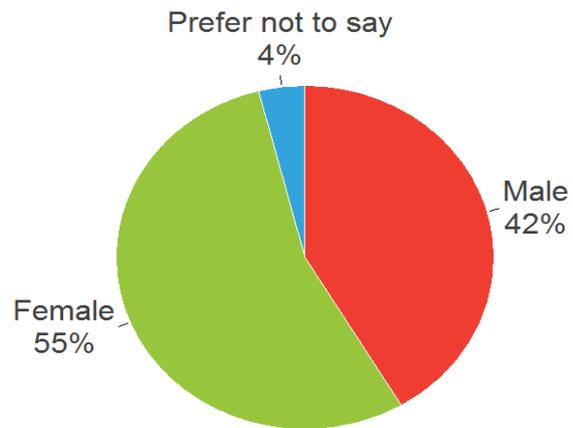
5.13 The figures below show the age and gender profile of the survey respondents.

About You



**Figure 7 - Respondents Age**

### What is your gender?



**Figure 8 - Respondents Gender**

## 6. ENGAGEMENT EVENTS

- 6.1 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) 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 2019/20 and asked to provide their views.

#### **Extra Care Facilities.**

- 6.6 Overall most respondents agreed that this was the right area for investment with comments recognising that as an ageing population it was important to invest in such new facilities. There were slight concerns about the locations of the facilities and a small number of respondents who felt this area should not be invested in.

*“Happy to invest in Extra Care.”*

*“Ageing population so this is important.”*

*“Need for independent living, people are falling through the net so this is a priority.”*

*“Yes – people are living longer.”*

*“Good idea, excellent. Older people trying to be independent this will help.”*

*“Need to care for older people, longer life expectancy.”*

*“Extra care facilities for ageing population is important. Place in location near young people.”*

*“Talbot Green is flat but Bronwydd isn’t. Why put one on a hill with wheelchair access not appropriate. Isolates less able people.”*

*“They have to be affordable for people. Is there any provision for homeless people?”*

### **Parks and Green Spaces**

- 6.7 Overall there was positive support for this area of investment with many people agreeing this was important for children and families to have good facilities. There were some concerns about the levels of dog fouling impacting on and a number of comments regarding areas for improvement.

*“Parks and green spaces are very important for families to have time outdoors. Some of them still need to be updated / improved.”*

*“Agree with investment in parks and green spaces.”*

*“Parks will be a brilliant investment.”*

*“Vital for environmental reasons. Need to maintain for future generations. Park run- it’s essential they’re maintained for this.”*

*“Not enough places- invest.”*

*“More investment needed in parks. Some are wrecks- rather see investment in parks than leisure centres.”*

*“More investment in Aberdare Country Park.”*

*“These are essential to invest in. We’ve got lots of these but not a lot of children using these days.”*

*“Dog wardens need to come down on people a lot more. Dog fouling is a big problem.”*

*“More dog bins needed...”*

*“Dog fouling- more enforcement officers needed.”*

*“Don’t think that this is a priority at the moment.”*

*“Quite good- doesn’t need investment.”*

*“Not a priority for me.”*

### **Highways and Road Improvements**

- 6.8 Most respondents agreed with investment in this area with the majority of comments referring to the condition of the roads and issues with potholes. There were some comments regarding issues with public transport. There were also a small number of comments made regarding the timescales of repairs and the perceived efficiency of the service.

*“Roads need attention been neglected.”*

*“Aberdare Bypass- Good idea. Residents need more details.”*

*“Roads- continue to invest. Lots of new houses so need to make sure transport links will be suitable.”*

*“Roads need more investment.”*

*“Repair potholes quicker.”*

*“Sort potholes quicker. Need more investment.”*

*“Roads are atrocious.”*

*“Need to invest- potholes everywhere.”*

*“When roads get repaired they’re just patched up- not done properly.”*

*“Get priorities right first- road links should be improved as a first base to build investments. This will help all other areas.”*

*“More investment in public transport.”*

*“Public transport- buses between the valleys is difficult.”*

*“Transport to hospital is an issue. Can take more than one bus to get to the hospital.”*

*“Roads- as a lorry driver I am pleased with these.”*

*“Taff vale regeneration- will feel more connected to the Park with the new bridge and circular walking.”*

### **Bryn Pica Eco Park**

- 6.9 Most respondents were supportive of investment in this area with the topic of recycling being an important one to many of the people who engaged with officers. There were some concerns about the levels of

education about recycling and suggestions that this should be focussed on to improve recycling across the borough.

*"More investment in education on recycling and reducing waste is a good idea, although there's a lot of stuff you can't recycle."*

*"Recycling and education- important investment."*

*"We've all got to do a lot more to recycle and protect the environment."*

*"Anything to encourage knowledge and education of recycling."*

*"This is a good idea. All recycling done on one site rather than hauling to external companies all over the country – carbon footprint reduction."*

*"If we need to recycle then we need to invest."*

*"Trips for schools really interesting."*

*"Recycling shops like 'Too good to waste' good idea if bought by Bryn Pica."*

*"Stuff being thrown away that could be re-used. 'The shed' is a good idea that should be rolled out all over RCT."*

*"Instead of educating about what can or can't be recycled I just get sent a letter or a sticker on my bin. It doesn't help for future."*

### **Regeneration of Town Centres**

- 6.10 There was support for investment in this area with many respondents feeling it is important to support businesses and attract visitors to town centres. There were comments made regarding the need for more shops and improvements in parking to support this.

*"Parking fees low to encourage more shoppers."*

*"Give smaller businesses a chance by having lower fees. Re-evaluate as you go along."*

*"...the number of empty shops is a nightmare, on a Friday the market takes all the trade away from the shops in Mountain Ash."*

*"The car park is full now it's free to park, but people use the free car park to get on the train to Ponty and Cardiff from Mountain Ash. We need to put short stay for free back into the car park and re-introduce charges for long stay."*

*"Nothing in town centres- shops need support. New shops needed."*

*"If towns look appealing to people they're more likely to visit."*

*"All for supporting regeneration of town centres. We should stop shopping online and spend more in towns. We need to invite more market stalls etc. to visit towns."*

*"Generally happy with Ponty town centre however the lack of big name shops is concerning."*

*"More investment in Rhondda towns not just Ponty and Aberdare."*

*"Damage from out of town developments. Focus on town centres, parking is a problem."*

*"Shops are closing so welcome anything to encourage more people into the area."*

*"Support smaller businesses in town centres."*

*"Get some discount retailers into town to draw people in."*

*"Would like to see more use of units above shops."*

### **Community Hubs**

- 6.11 The majority of people felt that investment in community hubs was important and commented on the ease of access for services as a positive improvement for communities. There were some comments regarding the location and services provided needing to match current provisions and concerns about parking and disabled access. A small number of respondents disagreed with this area for investment due to concerns about their success or loss of current centres.

*"Community hubs are good opportunities for local businesses and give opportunities to residents."*

*"More social hubs are a good idea, a good place for people to go."*

*"Expand the services within community hubs- protecting services particularly library."*

*"Makes more sense to have a central point and make everyone aware of this."*

*"Good idea- would use. Everything in one place."*

*"Would be happy to see community hubs as services would be easier to access such as citizen's advice."*

*"Depends what is on offer."*

*"Car parking would be an issue."*

*"St Mairs- Car parking is an issue."*

*"Depends where they would be situated."*

*"Once you've amalgamated these you can't go back- have to be sure they work."*

*"Do all services have to be in the same building? Hirwaun already has these close together, is it efficient to move them all together?"*

*"Make use of current buildings. Current day centre in Gelli needs investment but not a new building."*

*"Mountain Ash library should have been kept where it is. Day centre won't be the same in the hub."*

### **Business Units**

- 6.12 Most respondents felt that it was important to invest in businesses but did not fully support the creation of new units and that current buildings should be developed instead. There were some respondents who felt this area did not warrant investment unless there was a demand for places and improvements made to communication links.

*"Lots of businesses are already empty- do we need to spend more on new ones. Why not make use of the existing ones."*

*"Treforest Industrial estate is underutilised. Just use what we've already got. With bridge tolls being scrapped now is the time to promote the area."*

*"Not sure about this as some are underused already."*

*"We've already got lots of these that aren't being used."*

*"Not used much, they've tried and it didn't work in Cwmbach."*

*"Don't think this will attract people- we've already got lots of places to use if needed."*

*"Is there a demand for businesses for these units? Do people want to come here?"*

*“Communication links are not good enough to be able to support business needs.”*

*“Yes- need to attract businesses.”*

*“Good idea for Robertstown but roads are very narrow so not ideal to attract businesses.”*

*“These are important. I’ve recently had to look outside of RCT due to lack of provision.”*

## **PART B Results – Key Areas**

- 6.13 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

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

### **Digitalisation**

*“Good idea but make sure that everyone can be online.”*

*“Invest- key given the continuing roll out of universal credit and the ability for residents to manage and maintain an online tally.”*

*“I use online services to pay council tax and find this very easy- good area to invest.”*

*“Good to encourage people to use facilities.”*

*“This links to efficiency- makes everything quicker.”*

*“Faster banking payments needed from both sides.”*

*“Digitalisation takes jobs.”*

*“More online services to be more efficient- but adequate training and support for all residents to allow for easy access and understanding.”*

*“Libraries are closing but these have internet access. How can this be achieved?”*

*“A lot of people don’t have computers.”*

*“Not many elderly would take this up. Agile working is good- lots of possibilities here.”*

*“Need to retain good face to face service as well. Some people are not comfortable using online services.”*

*“Discriminates against people who have low ability. Nice idea but not practical.”*

*“It’s about 10 years too early- older people won’t use online services.”*

*“I’d be concerned about job cuts relating to agile working.”*

*“It’s a challenge- not always happy to do things online. It’s important that places like libraries stay open.”*

### **Early Intervention and Prevention**

*“Early intervention to address problems (e.g. behavioural) is a good thing.”*

*“Social services are excellent- they’re on top of everything. This is definitely an area of focus.”*

*“Important to provide support/intervention before problems escalate- mental health support is an issue.”*

*“More support workers with schools. Invest more in providing this within schools.”*

*“This is good as it will make savings later on- invest here.”*

*"This is the most important. Will affect everybody and would be good for communities."*

*"Prevention is better than cure so I think this is a good idea to invest in."*

*"Why deal with a problem when you can tackle it early. Good idea."*

*"Good idea but the services don't link up to make this effective."*

*"Most sensible route but can we afford this?"*

*"It's not happening at the moment. Lots of pressure is being added to schools to tackle problems."*

*"Could be more expensive by having more social workers/ staff or GP referrals."*

### **Commercialisation**

*"Leisure centres should sell sports merchandise such as towels, swimming costumes, goggles, water bottles etc. Sometimes people forget kit and it's a great way to make some money."*

*"Homecare and repair services for the elderly."*

*"Tree surgeons, gardeners as long as prices are competitive."*

*"A lot of services people would be interested in like gardening. People would be more trusting of council services."*

*"Makes sense if already for the facilities to offer services e.g. MOT/Tree surgery."*

*"Gardening services- more elderly people would be more trusting."*

*"This is particularly good for the elderly, have a list of people that have also been recommended by the council."*

*"Puts someone out of a job."*

*"Good idea to bring in but would it be at a detriment to current residents. All this would cost money to set up but have to ensure that it can be afforded."*

*"This is a good idea as long as it doesn't affect 'one man band' companies."*

### **Efficiency**

*“Review services as likely to be ways of making more efficient- way to save money.”*

*“Always need to do this. Electric vehicles, small vehicles- save money on this.”*

*“There’s a lot of admin roles that are unnecessary.”*

*“Increase productivity of staff.”*

### **Independence**

*“It’s more beneficial to keep people at home for as long as possible. Even if had to pay for it.”*

*“Invest to support elderly.”*

*“Elderly relatives so this is important to support them to stay in their own homes for as long as possible.”*

*“Keep people more independent for longer in their own homes- in the long run it’s cheaper than going into a home.”*

*“Means no hospital bed blocking and less dependence on other services- this is a good thing.”*

*“Definitely important- we’re all living longer.”*

*“Good idea but what about socialising?”*

*“This goes hand in hand with efficiency. People having grants for aids then move on, have to either pay to remove it all or pay to have it all done again elsewhere. Need to tackle this by focusing on new build houses being adaptable for needs at the outset.”*

### **Council Tax**

- 6.15 Residents were asked what level of Council Tax increase would be acceptable for the next financial year. The table overleaf shows that of the 99 people that responded at the events, 47% felt that a council tax increase of 3% would be acceptable.

C.Tax Increase	%
0%	30
1%	13
3%	47
5%	7
Over 5%	3
Base -99	

**Table 15: Preferred level of Council Tax increase**

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

*“0%- wouldn’t like a rise, pension doesn’t go up.”*

*“0%- Don’t know what we’re benefitting from it.”*

*“0%- Understand investment but loathed to give RCT another penny.”*

*“0%- Why do we pay more than other areas but our service areas are poorer. There’s no value for money.”*

*“1%- No one wants to spend more but have to spend to maintain facilities. Would be happy to pay between 1-2%.”*

*“1%- Keep in line with pay increase.”*

*“3%- As long as it protects services, happy to increase to 3%.”*

*“3%- As long as they spend it on the right things.”*

*“3%- Keep as low as possible but need to be sensible and money needs to be made somewhere.”*

*“3%- At least 3%- won’t be enough but people won’t be able to go above 5%.”*

*“3%- Have to put in if want to get more out.”*

*“3%- Happy to go up a little bit to provide better services.”*

*“3%- Only if I know where it’s being spent. If not I’d be unhappy it going up.”*

*“3%- acceptable to me, maximum as a pensioner.”*

*“3%- Wouldn’t like to pay but have to pay more for services.”*

*“3%- I think we get good value for what we currently pay.”*

*“5%- Cuts may need to consider it going above 3% this year.”*

*“5%- Because of economy council tax may need to go up.”*

*“5%- It’s good to know where council tax is being spent.”*

*“5+%- Happy to pay to improve services.”*

*“5+%- If it protects services.”*

## 6.16 **Older Person Advisory Group (OPAG)**

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. There were some queries regarding what effect this could have on services or what services could be affected and some members felt this prevented them from fully supporting this option.

### **Council Tax**

The group discussed and went on to agree a 3% Council Tax increase, however after further discussion regarding the effect to services, the group agreed a final 4% Council Tax increase in order to close the budget gap further and protect more services.

### **Schools Budget**

The group agreed that the increase proposed seemed reasonable.

### **Councils Priorities**

The group discussed the council’s priorities and agreed that Digitalisation and Early Intervention & Prevention were of particular importance for investment.

*“We have increased the number of people in the forum getting online but it is still not high enough. The danger is there are still people who are not online. It’s a good priority but other people need to be considered.”*

*“For older people in particular, Early Intervention & Prevention and Digitalisation are priorities.”*

### **Investment areas**

The group discussed each of the investment areas outlined in the presentation and the general consensus around these was positive and everyone agreed.

### **Other areas of investment**

When asked whether the group had any other ideas for investment, public toilets and pavements were referenced. .

## 6.17 **Disability Forum**

An engagement session was also 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.

### **Council Tax**

Most people agreed that a small increase in Council Tax to maintain services would be more preferable than cutting services however it was noted that there was no explanation of what services would likely be cut and it wasn't clear enough about what current service levels are in order to fully agree with either option. Some comments included:

*"Figures should be clearly conveyed to help people understand."*

*"There'd be uproar if any increase was over 5% as people's incomes won't afford it."*

*"If we didn't implement rises people need to know what they will be losing and what they can expect to receive if it were to increase."*

Everyone agreed that they currently don't receive enough information about what Council Tax supports or what affect increases could have on service levels and therefore felt that this should be improved in order to be able to fully agree to future increases. Some comments on this included:

*"90p doesn't sound a lot but what are we getting for this and what would we lose if it wasn't increased?"*

*"Don't mind paying but would want to know what this actually means for services."*

*"Not clear enough what Council Tax is being used for."*

When asked if they agreed that it was reasonable to increase the Schools budget all members of the group agreed however there were

some comments that this money won't make a significant difference to schools and concerns about how this money would be divided.

*"What are schools actually getting for this? Do they have to bid for funding or is it equally shared?"*

*"It seems a lot but when shared out it isn't a lot really to make a difference."*

### **Fees and Charges**

The group were asked for their views on fees and charges with most agreeing that these should not be increased and frozen at their current levels or even decreased.

### **School Meals**

All members of the group agreed this should not be increased. Comments highlighted that this would increase the financial burden on families.

*"This will hit the budget of the family when they are already struggling."*

### **Summer/Winter pitch fees:**

All members agreed that these should not be increased as this is an important area to influence healthy living.

*"This shouldn't be increased as this encourages activity and healthy lifestyles. This will lead on to other areas being affected as healthier residents may need less services."*

### **Leisure Centre fees**

The group were split on this point initially with some members feeling strongly that the fees should be increased however other members felt that these should also decrease as with pitch fees as this also contributes to healthy lifestyles.

### **Car Parking**

All members agreed that these should not be increased and felt strongly that free parking particularly in Aberdare has had a negative effect on businesses. Comments included:

*"Free parking in Aberdare is a terrible idea, at the moment it's being misused by staff blocking up the spaces early morning. It's not allowing shoppers to use them. This will affect businesses."*

### **Burial/Cremation fees**

All members of the group agreed that these should be reduced in order to relieve the burden from families.

*“You’re under so much stress anyway this should be taken into consideration when you then have to find the fees.”*

### **Pest Control**

This divided group members with many feeling that it was fair to charge residents for this service as long as the problem was on their own property but that the fees should remain the same. An issue was raised that if the problem was as a result of a business or other property then it should not be down to the individual to pay. Some comments included:

*“I think it’s fair to pay a fee to not have any more problems.”*

*“When the issue is caused by a business it’s not fair that I had to pay. The business should have been made to take the cost or not be charged at all.”*

*“This should be free, elderly people having to pay isn’t right. Working people should pay but not the elderly.”*

### **Council’s Priorities**

The group were asked for their views on the Council’s priorities.

#### **Digitalisation**

All group members felt that this had many negative aspects which prevented them from fully supporting this priority. Some comments include:

*“Surely this impacts on jobs- it’s not good.”*

*“We rely on digitalisation too much- if it all goes wrong we have to rely back on people anyway.”*

#### **Early intervention and prevention**

The group all agreed that this was an important priority and all fully supported this.

*“It’s crucial.”*

#### **Commercialisation**

All group members agreed that this was a good priority.

## **Efficiency**

All group members agreed that this also was a good priority.

## **Independence**

The group all agreed that this was important, especially as residents with disabilities.

*“As a disabled person I fully agree with this.”*

## **Highways and Road Improvements**

All members of the group agreed that this area required continued investment but there were some concerns about specific road plans including Treorchy. Comments included:

*“Treorchy bypass will kill Treorchy town. I’m a motorist so like bypasses but this will damage the town.”*

*“What happened in Tonypandy will be the same that will happen in Treorchy.”*

## **Community Hubs**

Most members of the group felt that Community Hubs were a good area of investment although there were comments made regarding the accessibility and location of the hubs in order to fully support them.

*“It depends where they will be. We’d need easy access.”*

*“They’re a good idea but you’d need access for disabled people and to make sure that you can access all the services easily.”*

*“You’re bringing back what you had years ago, what’s the point in reverting back?”*

*“Cutting cost of overheads is a good thing but what will happen to the other buildings?”*

## 7. YOUNG PERSON ENGAGEMENT EVENTS

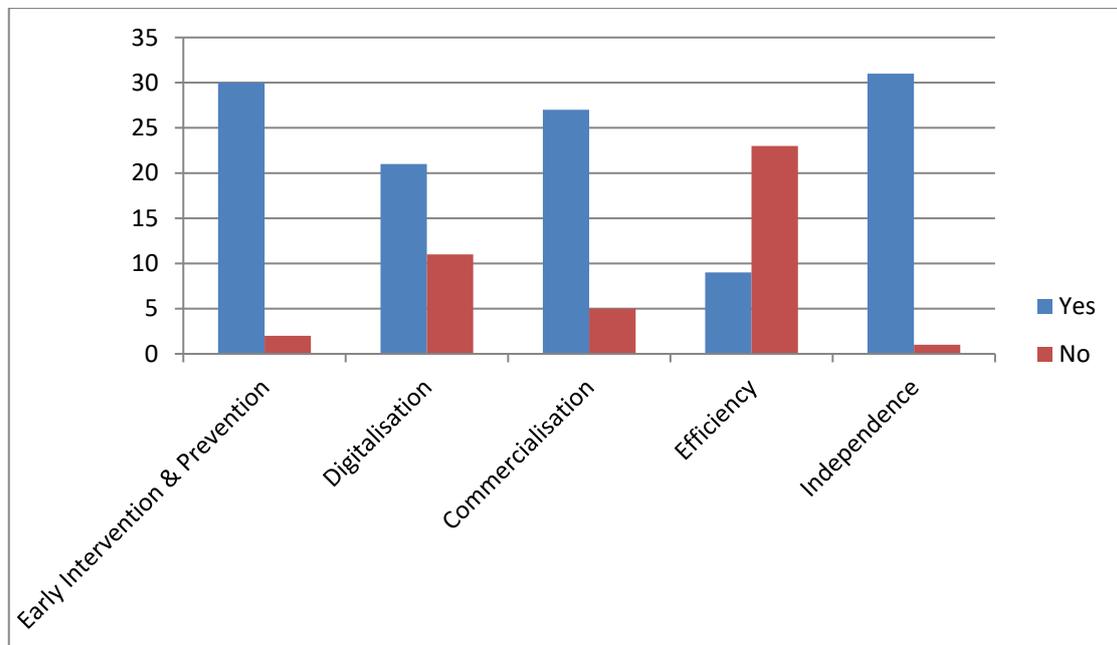
7.1 An engagement event was held with 32 members of Hawthorn Youth Club.

7.2 The event included a short presentation and an interactive key pad question and answer session to gauge their views on the Councils' budget, priorities and areas for investment.

### 7.3 Feedback

The following section outlines some of the feedback received.

#### Councils Priorities



**Figure 9 - Young Persons- Agreement with council's priorities**

7.4 The results show that the young people agreed with most of the priorities with the exception of 'Efficiency' with 23 people disagreeing with this.

#### Investment areas

All young people present agreed that investing in community groups was an important area with this being the only area that prompted full agreement.

Of high importance to them were improvements to parks and green spaces (23 people agreed) and the development of Community Hubs (17 people). Those with the lowest levels of support were Highways and

Roads (8 people agreed) and improving road traffic links (7 people agreed).

<u>Investment Area</u>	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>
Creating modern accommodation for older people	15	17
Parks and Green Spaces Improving Parks and Green Spaces	23	9
Improving Town Centre's	16	16
Building new roads to make travelling easier	8	24
Building Community Hubs	17	15
Providing recycling for businesses	10	22
Money for community groups and charities to provide services to residents in their area	32	0
Helping to prevent traffic	7	25
Base – 32 people		

**Table 16: Young Persons - Areas of Investment**

## 7.5 Council Tax

The results show that the majority of the young people who responded felt that there should be either 'No change' (10 people) or a 'Small Increase' (10 people) when asked about council tax levels.

Big Increase	2
Small Increase	10
No Change	10
Small Decrease	7
Big Decrease	1
Base – 30 People	

**Table 17: Young Persons- Level of Council Tax increase**

## 7.6 **Our Lady's Primary School**

An engagement session was also held with 15 Year 6 pupils from Our Lady's RC Primary school. This session was held as a trial for future events involving primary school pupils. The session was led by members of the Consultation team and using a prompt sheet to start discussion on the council's investment priorities.

## 7.7 **Council's Priorities**

The discussion centered on the 5 priorities outlined in the Corporate Plan and their views on ways the council can save money.

The following comments were made in relation to each area:

### **Digitalisation**

*"Good idea for investment. Could be able to book leisure centre parties online."*

*"To be able to book an appointment for a service e.g. handyman."*

*"A website of people who the council recommends for services."*

*"It's a good thing but the elderly shouldn't have to walk to the library every day."*

*"Access on a mobile library is a good thing."*

*"If you have to train someone you have to pay people. Some elderly people don't want to learn. They want basic services."*

*"Some people forget things easily so could be a waste of time trying to train them all the time."*

### **Early Intervention and Prevention**

*"Anti-Social behaviour, tackle it early to prevent problems becoming bigger."*

*"Bryn Ifor park- lot's of children gather there so might feel safer if more police around."*

*"More CCTV by houses to prevent problems."*

### **Commercialisation**

*"Gardening service, events (afternoon tea), housekeepers for elderly."*

### **Efficiency**

*“CCTV cameras- stop criminal damage by catching those doing it. Save money by preventing this.”*

*“Have an event like the Royal Welsh every year to earn money.”*

*“Could cut back on road sweepers- don't see the point in cleaning just for the sake of it. Only use if dirty.”*

*“People could grit their own streets more to cut costs but road care is important as roads will be dangerous with nothing.”*

### **Independence**

Some people might just need something simple to get by so it needs investment.

- 7.8 A general discussion was held around areas the pupils felt the council should invest in. Parks and Green Spaces emerged as their top priority with all discussion centred on this area. Comments included:

*“Bryn Ifor park- Do it out again. I've been on everything in there so it's a bit boring now.”*

*“Park maintenance needs to be invested in.”*

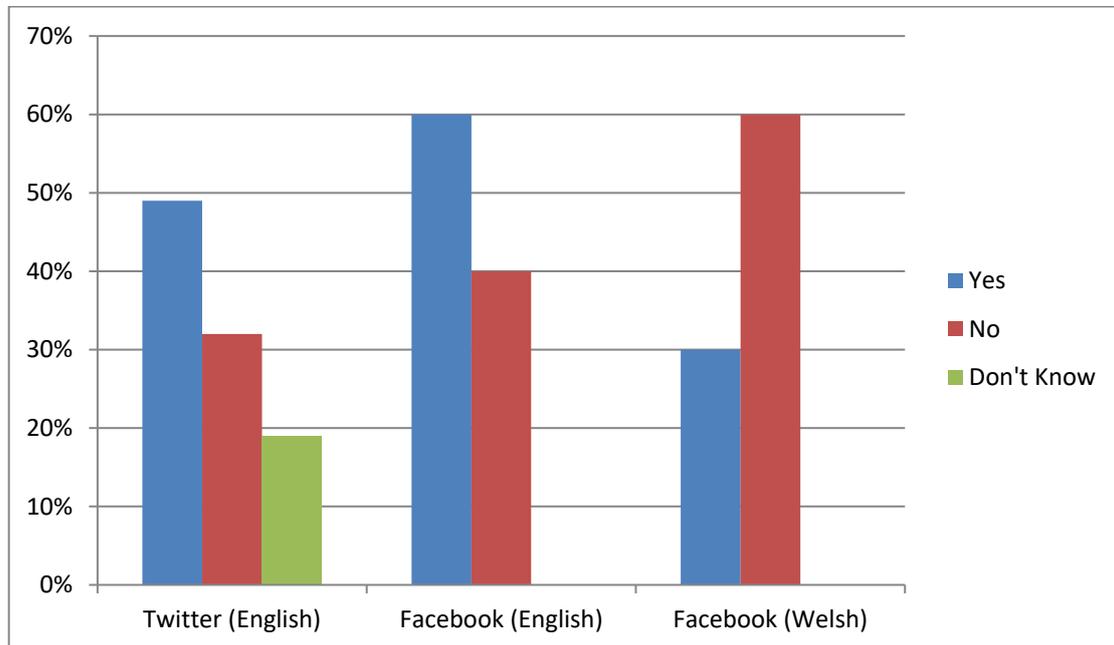
*“Beat the Street- bring this back to encourage young people to get out and about. Small prizes could be given to encourage people.”*

## 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;

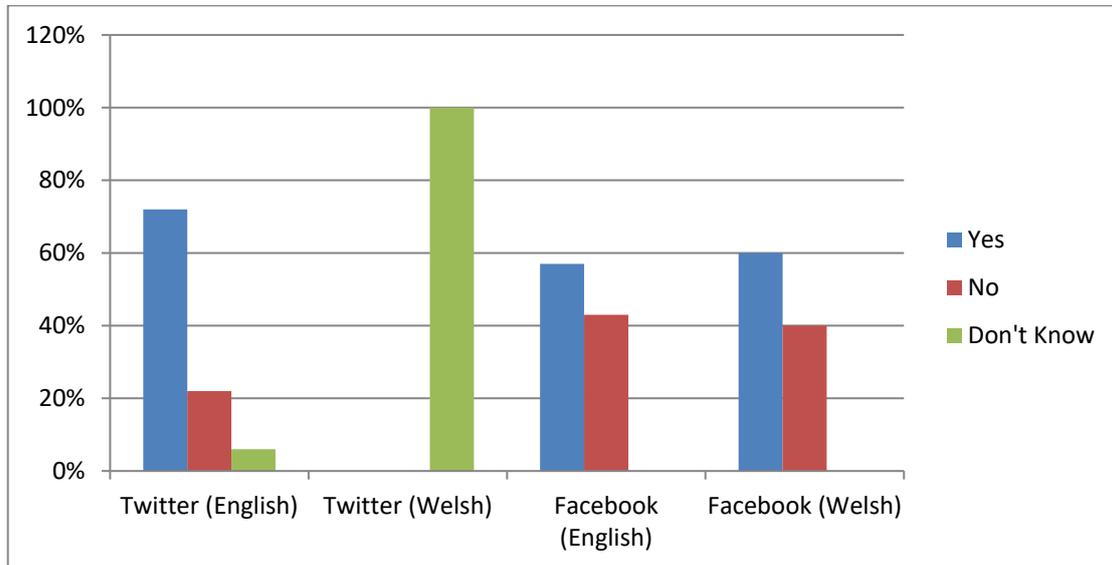
Poll 1 - To ensure the Council can continue to maintain & improve services in the face of continued cuts to public sector funding we are focusing on the areas: Early Intervention and Prevention, Digitalisation, Independence, Efficiency, Commercialisation. Do you agree with this approach?



Total number of votes: Twitter (106) Facebook English (249) Facebook Welsh (10)

**Figure 10 - Social Media Poll- 5 key areas**

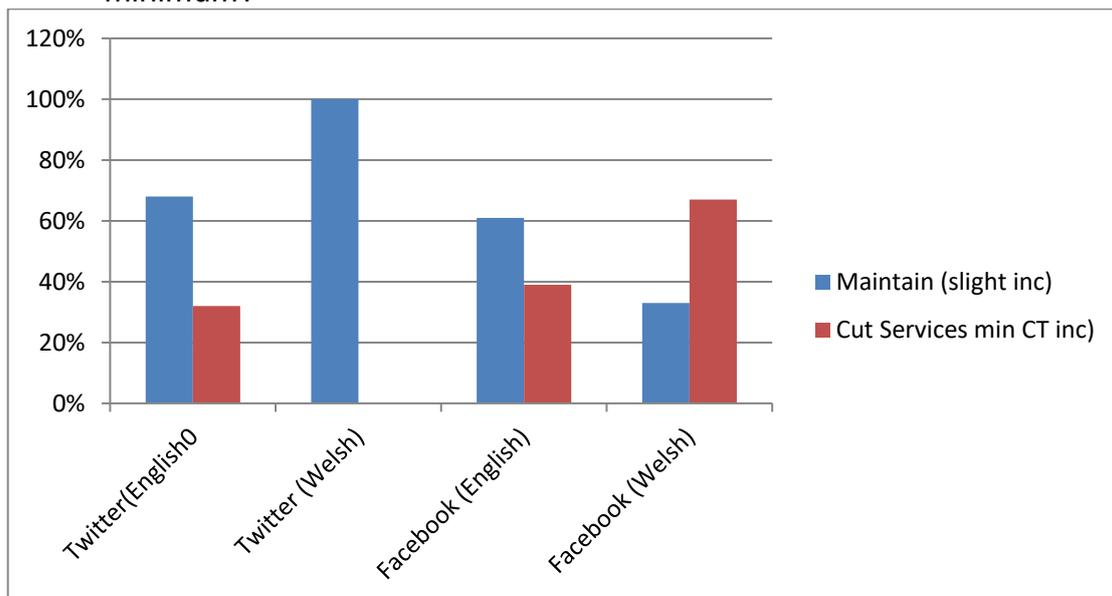
8.3 Poll 2- Have your say in our Budget Consultation 2019/20 - The Schools budget is proposed to be protected and increased by £2.2m. Do you think that this increase is reasonable for schools?



Total number of votes: Twitter English (87) Twitter Welsh (1) Facebook English (338) Facebook Welsh (15)

**Figure 11 - Social Media Poll- Agreement to protect Schools Budget**

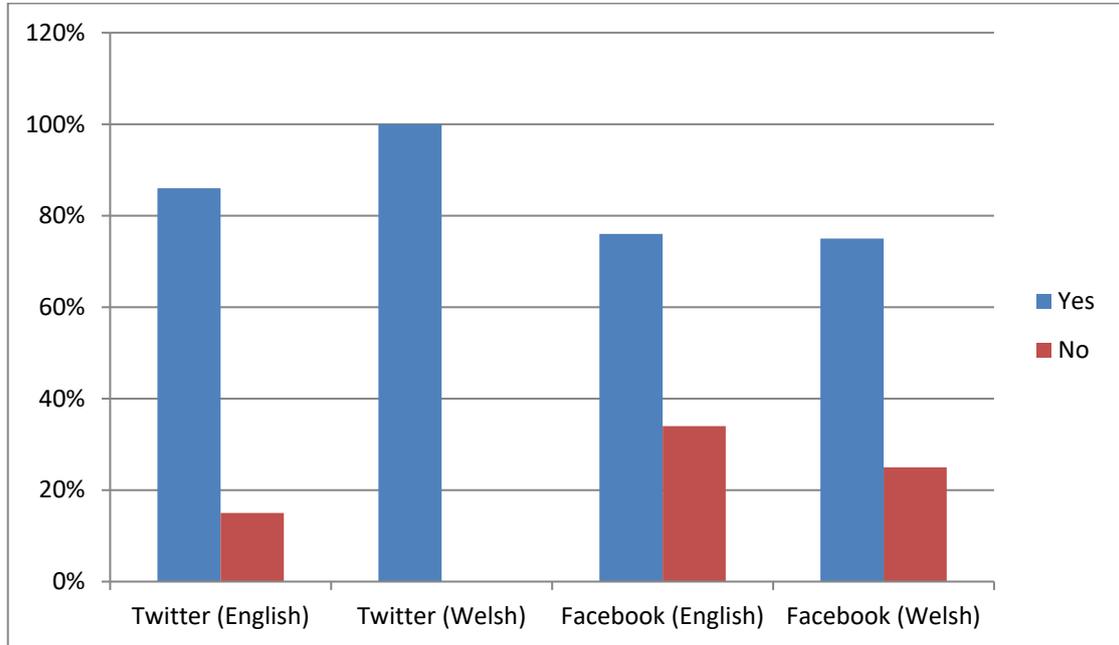
8.4 Poll 3 - With a £5.92M budget gap for 19/20, should the Council: maintain as many services as possible at the current level even if it means a reasonable increase in Council Tax; or, cut more services to close the budget gap and keep any increase in Council Tax to a minimum?



Total number of votes: Twitter English (188) Twitter Welsh (2) Facebook English (1642) Facebook Welsh (21)

**Figure 12 - Social Media Poll- Maintain / Cut Services and effect on Council Tax**

8.5 Poll 4 - The Council is investing capital funding in a range of areas, including; Parks/green spaces; town centres and regeneration; highways; and extra care housing to support independent living for older people, with on-site care and support. Do you agree with these priorities?



Total number of votes: Twitter English (117) Twitter Welsh (12) Facebook English (484) Facebook Welsh (16)

**Figure 13- Social Media Poll- Agreement with Investment areas**



**RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**FINANCE AND PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

Minutes of the meeting of the Finance and Performance Scrutiny Committee meeting held on Tuesday 11<sup>th</sup> December 2018 at 5.00 pm at the Council Chamber, The Pavilions, Cambrian Park, Clydach Vale, Tonypany, CF40 2XX.

**County Borough Councillors - Finance and Performance Scrutiny Committee Members in attendance:-**

County Borough Councillor J. Williams- Chair

G. Caple J. Cullwick G. R. Davies  
J. Elliott A. Davies- Jones W. Lewis  
G. Thomas R. Yeo

**Other Members in Attendance**

County Borough Councillor L. M. Adams- Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee  
County Borough Councillor M. Norris- Cabinet Member for Corporate Services

**Non-Committee/ Education Co-Opted Members in Attendance**

Mr J Fish - Elected Parent / Governor Representative

**Officers in attendance**

Mr C Hanagan, Director of Communications & Interim Head of Democratic Services  
Mr C Jones, Director, Legal & Democratic Services  
Mr B Davies, Director of Financial Services  
Mr P Griffiths, Service Director, Performance & Improvement  
Ms L. Davies - Head of Public Protection  
Ms R. Hope - Food & Health Safety Manager  
Ms P. McCarthy – Head of Legal Property and Estates

**24. WELCOME**

The Chair welcomed Members to the Committee and introduced herself as the new Chair of the Finance and Performance Scrutiny Committee.

**25. DECLARATION OF INTEREST**

In accordance with the Council's Code of Conduct, County Borough Councillor G. Davies informed the Committee that he is currently the Chair for one of the businesses under scrutiny. Members noted his declaration of interest.

## 26. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from County Borough Councillors S. Bradwick, G. Holmes, M. J. Powell, S. Rees- Owen, A. Fox and T. Williams.

## 27. MINUTES

It was **RESOLVED** to approve the minutes of the 17<sup>th</sup> October 2018 as an accurate reflection of this meeting.

## 28. REPORT OF THE GROUP DIRECTOR - CORPORATE AND FRONTLINE SERVICES

The Service Director- Performance & Improvement provided Members with the Quarter 2 Council Performance Report (to 30<sup>th</sup> September 2018).

Members were asked to scrutinise the Council's financial and operational performance position as at the 30<sup>th</sup> September 2018 and to consider whether they wish to scrutinise in greater depth any matters contained in the report.

The Service Director referred Members to Appendix 1 of the report, which contained the Council's Quarter 2 Performance Report that was presented to Cabinet on the 21<sup>st</sup> November 2018. Members were informed that the report contains revenue and capital budget performance; treasury Management prudential indicators; Organisational Health information including staff turnover, sickness and Council strategic risks; Corporate Plan priority action plan updates; other national measures; and target setting.

The Service Director specifically highlighted for Members the 14 Corporate Plan performance measures that were 'Not on target' as at Quarter 2 and also indicated that out of 6 national measures reported at Quarter 2 (that do not form part of the Council's Corporate Plan), one measure was 'Not on Target', three were 'On Target' and two were 'Within 5% of target'.

The Service Director went on to provide Members with an overview of the key information included within the Executive Summary of the Report and in particular he brought Members attention to:

- The Council's Revenue Budget performance was projected to be £1.286M overspent at year-end primarily due to budget pressures within Adult Social Care. He added that the projected overspend position did not take account of additional funding announced by Welsh Government on 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2018 to support sustainable social services across Wales and that this would be built into Performance Reports later in the year.
- The Council's Capital Programme Budget, where generally positive progress had been made with expenditure totalling £42.7M as at Quarter 2.
- Organisational Health and specifically sickness absence levels showing an improved position compared to 30<sup>th</sup> September 2017 and 31<sup>st</sup> March 2018. He added that on-going attention will be afforded to this area to support staff health and well-being.
- Corporate Plan progress updates, where overall positive progress had been

made during Quarter 2 in areas such as school attainment results, Extra Care development, the new Resilient Families Programme, Public Space Protection Order for Alcohol Controls and recycling. The Service Director also highlighted areas where further work is required due to quarter 2 performance being below that targeted; this included visitor numbers in leisure centres and libraries, the number of children looked after, the rate of delayed transfers of care for social care reasons and the successful prevention of people becoming homeless.

Following the update, Members asked a number of questions.

A Member noted that section 3.5 of the Report referenced 19 national measures that did not form part of the Council's Corporate Plan; however, only six measures were referenced in the Report's summary. The Service Director referred Members to Section 5e of the Report that set out the timecales for the remaining national measures to be reported during the year.

A Member referenced the Place priority update that noted six individuals were stopped for drinking alcohol in excluded areas, in line with the Public Space Protection Order for Alcohol Control, and asked what the outcome was for each. The Service Director informed Members that he would request an update from the relevant service area and feedback to Members following the meeting.

A Member referred the Committee to the Children Services section of the Revenue Budget and the significant underspend around staffing levels, and requested clarity on the potential impact of this position on the Resilient Families Programme. The Service Director advised Members that temporary staffing vacancies are being managed across all areas of Children's Services, including the Resilient Families Service, to ensure the appropriate capacity is in place to meet service needs.

Following discussion, Members **RESOLVED** to;

1. Endorse the Council's financial and operational performance position as at 30<sup>th</sup> September 2018 (Quarter 2).
2. Receive feedback on the outcomes of the 6 individuals stopped as part of the Council's Public Space Protection Order for Alcohol Controls.

## **29. REGISTER OF FOOD BUSINESSES IN RCT**

The Director of Communications & Interim Head of Democratic Services began by explaining to Members that at the Council meeting on the 24<sup>th</sup> of October 2018, a Notice of Motion was received and it was resolved to refer the matter to the Finance and Performance Committee for further consideration;

*"We should all play our part in supporting our local economy and SMEs who make up the majority of it. In an effort to better support our local food production companies; this Council will create a food produce register. The register will list all local food and drink producers in the County Borough of Rhondda Cynon Taf with the aim of encouraging and promoting an increase in the marketing and consumption of local produce, thereby supporting the local economy."*

The Director of Communications & Interim Head of Democratic Services advised Members that in order to progress the Notice of Motion, it will be up to Members to decide if they want to proceed by referring the matter back to a future meeting of the Committee or by establishing a Working Group to consider the matter in greater depth.

Following discussion, it was **RESOLVED** to establish a Working Group so that Members may consider the Notice of Motion in more detail.

### **30. PRESENTATION - REVENUE BUDGET CONSULTATION 2019/20**

With the aid of a PowerPoint presentation, the Director of Financial Services provided Members with an overview of the 2019/20 Revenue Budget Strategy Consultation and updated Committee on the following areas:

- General approach for 2019/20
- Provisional Local Government Settlement – Headlines
- Implications for Rhondda Cynon Taf
- Consultation
  - Budget
  - Simulator
  - Corporate Plan
  - Council Tax Reduction Scheme
- Budget Setting Timetable

Following the update, 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 line with its Terms of Reference and as a consultee as part of the 2019/20 Revenue Budget Strategy Consultation process. The Director added that the feedback provided by Members would be presented to Cabinet alongside the feedback from all other consultees as part of Cabinet agreeing a proposed Budget Strategy for 2019/20.

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

For a number of consultation questions, some Members considered that the wording of questions was too simplistic and misleading, for example:

- Question 1 (addressing the Council's budget gap) - it could imply that an increase in Council Tax would mean no further cuts to services;
- Question 2 (Council Tax) - it would be more informative for the annual cost of each Council Tax option to be included to help inform consultees feedback; and
- Question 3 (Schools Budget) – further information should accompany the question to set out the financial challenges facing schools.

The Director of Communications & Interim Head of Democratic Services noted Members feedback and advised that questions have been written in a simplified way to help make them understandable to the wide audience that partake in the budget consultation process, including consultees providing feedback via social media.

With regard to Question 1, a Member fed back that he would lean more toward maintaining 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 rather than cutting services to keep any increase in Council Tax to a minimum.

A Member queried the reference on page 125 of the report to a “young persons consultation event” and asked for further information as to what this involved. The Director of Financial Services advised that this involved a YEPs officer leading discussions at a youth club, a discussion with Year 6 pupils at a primary school in addition to engaging directly with young people via social media forums.

In respect of Question 2 on Council Tax, Members were asked to consider their preferred level of Council Tax increase for the next financial year i.e. 0%, 1%, 3%, 5% or over 5%, noting that a 3% increase has been factored into the modelled budget gap. Following discussion, the views expressed by some members were:

- I think most people would prefer a 0% increase;
- Around a 3% increase; and
- Council Tax is an unfair tax and does not raise much money, and there should be a local income tax instead linked to how much people can pay.

With regard to Question 3 around whether the proposal to protect and increase the schools budget by £2.2M was ‘reasonable’, ‘not reasonable’ or ‘don’t know’, Members feedback was:

- Although the proposal will represent an increase to the school budget, there will still be a gap in real terms;
- The proposed increase is reasonable for schools and it is important to set in the context of the financial pressures that other Council Services are operating within such as Adult Social Care; and
- More financial support should be provided to new schools, particularly in years 1 and 2, to help put them on a stable footing.

In addition, a Member enquired whether the Teachers Pay Award Agreement is incorporated into the proposed £2.2M increase for schools as if so, a significant proportion of the additional funding would be required to fund this area. The Director of Financial Services confirmed that the Teachers Pay Award Agreement would be a cost to be funded from the proposed additional funding to schools. The Director added that Welsh Government are allocating additional resources for schools in this regard and these are proposed to be fully passported to the sector. The Director went on to highlight that the Council proposes in 2019/20 to continue the long term strategy for schools to be treated more favourably than other Council Services and indicated that the proposed additional funding would not fully cover all forecasted cost pressures facing schools and schools would need to make important decisions to balance their budgets.

Another Member sought clarity around whether the position in England whereby the UK Government has not announced the final settlement figure for Local Government because of the uncertainty surrounding Brexit also applied to Wales. The Director of Financial Services confirmed to Members that the final settlement is expected from the Welsh Government on the 19<sup>th</sup> December 2018.

In relation to Question 4 on fees and charges, a Member enquired whether increased fees means a decrease in use and whether the Council conducts research on the impact increased fees would have on larger service areas. The Director of Financial Services advised Members that market testing and comparisons with neighbouring local authorities are taken into account when fees and charges are reviewed.

Another Member enquired whether Leisure Centre membership prices are taken into account in terms of freezing charges. The Director of Financial Services confirmed that the Council's Leisure Centre Membership price has been frozen since January 2018 and in parallel a significant programme of on-going investment is being made into Centres to further improve the standard of facilities available.

The Director of Financial Services asked Members if there was any other feedback they would like to provide on the Council's budget, as part of Question 5 of the presentation. A Member commented that there should be a National Care System along a similar line to the National Health Service.

In terms of questions 6, 7 and 8 around should the Council focus on the areas of Digitalisation, Early Intervention and Prevention, Commercialisation, Efficiency and Independence, and also invest in specific areas to support the delivery of Corporate Plan priorities, some Members indicated that they would like to have had further information to inform their feedback and is an area for consideration as part of formulating the Committee's work programme for the forthcoming year.

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 CTR 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?
  - Members would support the backdating of claims being increased to 6 months.

In addition, a Member enquired whether the Council Tax Reduction Scheme would be affected by the changeover to Universal Credit. The Director of Financial Services informed Members that there could be delays during the changeover to Universal Credit and the Council has the option to extend the backdating period.

In conclusion, the Director of Financial Services informed Members that the Committee would have opportunity to pre-scrutinise the draft 2019/20 Budget Strategy in January 2019 and the Committee's feedback would be included in the draft Budget Strategy to be presented to Cabinet in February 2019.

The Director of Communications & Interim Head of Democratic Services also highlighted the opportunity for the Finance and Performance Scrutiny Committee to have oversight of the proposed questions for the 2020/21 Revenue Budget Consultation process to help ensure they are both meaningful and understandable for consultees.

Following discussion, it was **RESOLVED** that the views of Members as outlined above be fed into the consultation process.

**31. TO CONSIDER PASSING THE FOLLOWING RESOLUTION:-**

**RESOLVED** – that the press and public be excluded from the meeting under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act, 1972 (as amended) for the following items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information, as defined in paragraph 12 of Schedule 12A of the Act, namely, information relating to a particular individual. Transparency in the conduct of Local Authority business is desirable; however personal data relating to the conduct and capabilities of individuals will be discussed and considered. Consequently, it is considered the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing information

**32. REPORT OF THE GROUP DIRECTOR - CORPORATE AND FRONTLINE SERVICES**

The Director of Legal and Democratic Services reminded Members to treat the report, from pages 155 to 240, as confidential in nature.

The Head of Legal Property and Estates presented the Corporate Asset Management Plan 2018-2023 (CAMP) to Members. The report informed Members of the strategic direction and policy framework of CAMP.

Following consideration, Members **RESOLVED** to acknowledge the content of the report.

**This meeting closed at 6.40pm**

**Cllr J Williams  
(Chair)**



**APPENDIX 5III**

**SCHOOL BUDGET FORUM**

Minutes of the meeting of the School Budget Forum meeting held on Tuesday, 20<sup>th</sup> November 2018 at 2.00 pm at the Block F, The Pavilions, Cambrian Park. Clydach Vale, Tonypany, CF40 2XX.

**MINUTES**

<b>PRESENT</b>	<p>Councillor J Rosser (Chair)  Councillor A Morgan  Councillor M Webber  Councillor M. Norris  Councillor C. Leyshon</p> <p>Mr R Ellis, Ysgol Gyfun Cwm Rhondda  Mr R Jones, Treorchy Comprehensive  Ms. L. Bailey, Tonysguboriau Primary School  Ms B Cheetham, Y Pant Comprehensive  Mr D Jenkins, Ysgol Ty Coch  Dr Sue Mitchell. St John Baptist CiW High School  Mr Chris Coole, Darren Park Primary  Ms J Rees, Cwmlai Primary  Ms K. Retallick, Ysgol Nantgwyn  Ms Gemma Powell, Headteacher- Caradog Primary  Mr C Flynn, Central South Consortium</p>
<b>IN ATTENDANCE</b>	<p>Mr C Bradshaw  Mr B Davies  Ms C Edwards  Ms S Davies  Ms E. Randall</p>
<b>APOLOGIES</b>	<p>Councillor G Hopkins  Mr M Thomas, Tonyrefail Community School  Mr M Jones, Ysgol Gyfun Rhydywaun  Mr P Morgan, H Cwmaman Infants and Glynhaford Juniors  Mr D Davies, Ysgol Gynradd Gymraeg Aberdar  Ms Marie Claire Hopkin- Park Lane Special School  Ms D Gibbins RCTGA  Ms G Davies, Director of Education and Inclusion Services  Ms C Jones, NASUWT  Mr M Cleverley, NASUWT Rep</p>



No	Discussion / Action	Action	By Who
10	<p><b>WELCOME</b></p> <p>Councillor Rosser thanked everyone for their attendance and, in light of the forum receiving new membership, Counsellor Rosser asked Members to introduce themselves.</p>		Chair
11	<p><b>DECLARATION OF INTEREST</b></p> <p>There were no declarations of interest pertaining to the agenda.</p>		Chair
12	<p><b>APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE</b></p> <p>Apologies for absence were noted.</p>		Chair
13	<p><b>MINUTES</b></p> <p>The minutes of the meeting on the 18<sup>th</sup> July 2018 were approved as an accurate record.</p>		Chair
14	<p><b>BUDGET CONSULTATION</b></p> <p>With the aid of a PowerPoint presentation, the Director of Financial Services provided the forum with an overview of the 2019/20 Revenue Budget Strategy Consultation.</p> <p>Members were provided with information surrounding the general approach for 2019/20, the implications of the Local Government Settlement for RCT, the consultation process and the budget-setting timetable.</p> <p>The Director updated Members that the provisional Local Government Settlement for 2019/20 was announced on the 9<sup>th</sup> October 2018. The provisional settlement figure includes the teachers' pay award agreement (£13.7M) and increased cost of Free School Meals (£7M). Members were informed that specific grants have not yet been finalised and that there is a general capital funding decrease of £0.106M.</p>		BD



The release of a better than expected provisional settlement from the Welsh Government has meant the initial estimated budget gap of almost £17M has been reduced to £5.920M. Whilst this is a better position than initially modelled it is still a real term reduction in resources.

The Director explained that whilst this has had a very positive impact, it was recognised that further measures must be considered to address budget shortfalls for next year and into the medium term.

Members of the forum were informed that the budget consultation would be running from the 5/11/18 to the 17/12/18. The survey asks the public about Council Tax, the Schools Budget, Council priorities and Investment opportunities. Members were told that, to date, over 2,000 residents have responded.

Following on from the presentation, Members discussed levels of council services in light of the budget shortfall;

- Forum Members considered how the Council could continue to maintain services at the current level even if it meant an increase in Council Tax.
- Members questioned what would be a reasonable increase in Council Tax for residents in RCT. Councillor A. Morgan informed Members that the highest rise in RCT to date was 4.5% in 2014. The Director advised Members that a 1% increase would generate £826k of additional income and noted that a 3% increase has been factored in to arrive at the current budget gap. Members considered the balance of increasing Council Tax against how much it will affect residents in the County Borough. Members discussed the increases made by other Local Authorities and agreed that any



increase in Council Tax should not be more than 5%.

- In consideration of the proposal for the Schools Budget to be protected by £2.2M, it was acknowledged that although this is an increase, it is not enough to cover inflationary pressures such as pay award / pay progression and rises in pupil numbers. Discussions ensued around the proposed increase. Councillor A. Morgan informed Members that an additional £660,000 would be available to schools in RCT from the Welsh Government from April 2019. There are also grants for professional development training, although the specifics of these grants are yet to be established. The Director advised Members that funding of increases to teachers' pensions remains a risk.
- Members were updated on the ongoing commitment to invest in schools, play areas, 3G pitches and that education remains a key service in these plans.
- Consideration was given to Council fees and charges. Forum Members felt that priority should be given to school meals and leisure centre membership. Councillor A. Morgan informed the forum that the Council has seen a significant increase in leisure centre membership and income following investment in this area. The
- The Director advised Members that the Council's Corporate Plan (2016-2020) sets out the Council's vision across three priorities (Economy, People, Place) and that the Council is focusing on five key themes to maximise resources and deliver improved services:
  - Digitalisation
  - Early intervention and Prevention
  - Commercialisation
  - Efficiency
  - Independence



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Members agreed that digitalisation would generate savings and that this should be an area of focus for the Council.</li> <li>➤ Members then considered the Council Tax Reduction Scheme (CTRS). Forum Members considered whether 4 weeks was a reasonable period to continue paying Council Tax Reduction when someone returns to work (extended payments). Members were informed that the estimated amount of CTRS paid in relation to extended payments for 2018/19 is £29,500. The Director advised Members that the scheme provides discretion for the Council to extend the period to support the transition to the Universal Credit system. The Council can also backdate a claim for up to three months. Members were in agreement with the current extended period and backdating period applied by the Council.</li> <li>➤ Discussions ensued in relation to the CTRS and consideration was given as to whether it is it reasonable for the Council to continue to disregard War Disablement and War Widow's Pensions income when assessing entitlement to the CTRS. Members agreed that the Council's approach was reasonable.</li> </ul> <p>The Chair thanked the members and officers for their comments and spoke of the difficult position the Council would potentially be facing in meeting the budget gap before them, and reiterated that investing in schools was still a priority for the Council.</p> <p>Following discussion, Members <b>RESOLVED</b> to note the 2019/20 Budget Consultation.</p>		
15	<p><b>CLUSTER BUSINESS MANAGER</b></p> <p>With the aid of a PowerPoint presentation, the Head of Treorchy Comprehensive provided Members with a comprehensive review of the advantages and</p>	<p>Further information to be provided to Members at</p>	<p>Mr Rhys Angell-Jones Head of Treorchy</p>



disadvantages of employing a Cluster Business Manager (CSBM).

To begin, Members were informed that Treorchy Comprehensive school employed a CSBM in July 2017 through applying for a Welsh Government Grant. The Head of Treorchy outlined the advantages of having a CSBM;

- Workload management
- Increased time for teaching and learning
- financial efficiencies – effective procurement / contract negotiation
- effective deployment of resources
- community cohesion.

Further benefits to be achieved include;

- further analysis of individual and collective expenditure
- greater financial and time efficiencies
- Development of new cluster working methods.
- Safeguarding issues have become more effective such as identifying child protection risks much earlier
- Engagement of families/communities to support improvements.

The Head of Treorchy concluded the presentation by informing Members that the ability of the school to employ a CSBM in September 2019 will depend on the ability of the Local Authority to fund the position.

Following on from the presentation queries / comments were raised by Forum members in respect of:

- Covering the costs of the CSBM; The Head of Treorchy informed Forum Members that they are able to cover the cost and he reminded Members that the CSBM reduces the workload of Head Teachers and this cannot be measured in financial terms.

the next SBF Meeting



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ End of year evaluations; The Head of Treorchy informed Members that evaluations are done on a quarterly basis and the review is done by balancing financial costs against savings in time management</li> <li>➤ Financial efficiencies; The Head of Treorchy gave an example of where the CSBM can negotiate the instalment of CCTV at a competitive price.</li> <li>➤ Managing the CSBM; The Head of Treorchy informed Members that the CSBM manages his own workload and distributes his own time accordingly.</li> <li>➤ Improved collaboration between Comprehensive Schools and Cluster schools. It is a cost effective model for other Comprehensive schools to use.</li> </ul> <p>Members were pleased with the success of employing a CSBM. Following discussion, Members. <b>RESOLVED</b> to consider the funding for September 2019 subject to further information being provided by the Head of Treorchy at a future School Budget Forum meeting specifically on the cost / benefit of the post.</p>		
16	<p><b>SCHEME FOR FINANCING SCHOOLS</b></p> <p>The Head of Finance – Education &amp; Financial Reporting presented a report to Forum Members in relation to the updated Scheme for Financing Schools (<i>this is brought forward from the last SBF meeting</i>)</p> <p>The purpose of the Scheme is to define the financial relationship between the Local Authority and its maintained schools.</p> <p>Members were asked to comment and approve the revised Scheme. Members were referred to Appendix 1 of the report, which refers to the Scheme for Financing Schools 2018.</p>	Members to email comments/ amendments to the Head of Finance: Education and Financial Reporting.	SD



	<p>The Head of Finance- Education &amp; Financial Reporting asked Members to email any comments/amendments that they may have to her directly.</p> <p>It was <b>RESOLVED</b> to note the revised Scheme and to approve the changes subject to the Head of Finance incorporating any amendments received from Forum Members.</p>		
17	<p><b>PROPOSAL TO REMOVE CHEQUE BOOK SCHEME IN PRIMARY AND SPECIAL SCHOOL SECTORS</b></p> <p>The Head of Finance – Education &amp; Financial Reporting presented a report to Forum Members outlining the difference between schools that operate a “cheque book” facility for school budget accounts and those that do not and to recommend progressing to a consultation on the removal of the cheque book scheme.</p> <p>The Head of Finance- Education &amp; Reporting provided Members with the relevant background information;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Many schools have voluntarily opted to give up the cheque book and have their payments administered by the Local Authority. Only 28 out of 98 schools (29%) are remaining as cheque book schools.</li> <li>➤ Benefits of removing the cheque book scheme include; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ no need to maintain SIMS FMS</li> <li>○ no need to write or authorise cheques</li> <li>○ no need to run VAT reports</li> </ul> </li> <li>➤ Making Tax Digital for VAT will come into effect from April 2019. From that point, the Local Authority will need to keep records digitally. Compliance will be more effective with the detail of all transactions in the Council’s financial System rather than in satellite systems such as SIMS FMS</li> </ul>	To progress to a consultation and report the results back to the SBF at the end of the consultation period.	SD



	<p>➤ RCT has more than the average % of cheque book primary/special schools at 29%. RCT appear to be in the minority compared to other Local Authorities</p> <p>Following discussion, Members <b>RESOLVED</b> to approve the proposal and to therefore progress to a consultation on the removal of the cheque book scheme.</p>		
18	<p><b>DATE OF NEXT MEETING</b></p> <p>The Chair advised that the next meeting of the forum was the 12<sup>th</sup> February 2019 at 2pm.</p>		Chair

The meeting closed at 4:05 pm

Cllr J. Rosser  
(Chair)

## **PRE-SCRUTINY OUTCOMES**

### **RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNCIL FINANCE AND PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

Minutes of the meeting of the Finance and Performance Scrutiny Committee meeting held on Monday, 28 January 2019 at 5.00 pm at the Council Chamber, The Pavilions, Cambrian Park, Clydach Vale, Tonypany, CF40 2XX.

#### **County Borough Councillors - Finance and Performance Scrutiny Committee Members in attendance:-**

Councillor G. Thomas- In the Chair

Councillor G Davies	Councillor S Bradwick
Councillor R Yeo	Councillor W Lewis
Councillor T Williams	Councillor J Cullwick
Councillor G Caple	Councillor A Fox

#### **Other Members in Attendance;**

Councillor M. Adams - Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

#### **Non-Committee / Education Co-opted Members in Attendance**

Mr J Fish – Elected Parent / Governor Representative

#### **Officers in attendance**

Mr C Jones, Director, Legal & Democratic Services  
Mr B Davies, Director of Financial Services  
Ms A Richards, Head of 21st Century Schools  
Ms S Davies, Head of Finance: Education and Financial Reporting  
Ms L Gorringe, Business Manager Catering Services  
Mr P Griffiths, Service Director, Performance & Improvement

## **33 WELCOME**

The Vice-Chair introduced himself to the Committee and advised Members that he would be Chairing the meeting and that Councillor J. Williams (Chair) had given her apologies.

### **34 APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from County Borough Councillors J. Williams, A. Davies-Jones, J. Elliott, G. Holmes, M. J .Powell and S. Rees-Owen.

### **35 DECLARATION OF INTEREST**

**RESOLVED-** In accordance with the Council's Code of Conduct, there were no declarations made pertaining to the agenda.

### **36 MINUTES**

It was **RESOLVED** to approve the minutes of the 11<sup>th</sup> of December 2018 as an accurate reflection of the meeting.

### **Extract from Minutes**

### **37 THE COUNCIL'S DRAFT 2019/20 REVENUE BUDGET STRATEGY**

The Director of Financial Services provided Members with a presentation in respect of the Council's draft 2019/20 Revenue Budget Strategy, which contained the views of the Council's Senior Leadership Team under the following headings:-

- Council's Current Financial Position
- The 2019/20 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

The Director indicated that the overview provided the opportunity for the Committee to pre-scrutinise the draft Revenue Strategy proposals for 2019/20 and also that the views of the Committee would be fed back to Cabinet at its meeting in February 2019 and incorporated into the Revenue Budget Strategy report presented to full Council in March 2019.

Members noted the overview and discussions ensued.

In relation to the School Budget, a Member highlighted the importance for schools to receive information on their budgets for the forthcoming financial year as soon as possible. The Director of Financial Services advised the Committee that the Council's overall budget, that includes schools, will be reported to Council on 6<sup>th</sup> March 2019 and that work is

currently taking place with schools to ensure they are able to plan in readiness for the new financial year. Efforts will be made to issue draft allocations to schools before the February half term break, as has been the case for a number of years.

Another Member commended the proposed funding increase to schools and requested whether public communication could reflect the requirement that whilst a very positive proposal, there would still be the need for some savings to be made at an individual school level to balance their budgets. The Director of Financial Services acknowledged this and indicated that the proposed increase in funding to schools, should it be approved, will result in a significantly more positive treatment of schools in comparison with other Council Services and as compared to the Council's Welsh Government settlement level. In addition, another Member also commended the proposed treatment to school budgets but indicated the need to recognise that an increase in funding in one area can mean a reduction in another, and stressed the importance of Community Services such as adult social care and children's services. The Member added that he would support a specific question being included within future budget consultation exercises covering these areas.

The Director of Financial Services went on to update Members that confirmation is awaited from Welsh Government around funding for the Teachers' Pension increase. The Director added that the proposed Budget Strategy assumes that additional resources to cover the increase in Teacher's Pension costs will be funded via Welsh Government.

In respect of Fees and Charges, a Member requested whether further information could be provided on non-statutory services, such as the level of Council subsidy, when the Committee is considering proposals on fees and charges. The Director of Financial Services informed the Committee that detailed budget information on all Council Services is set out in its annual Budget Book, that is available on the website, and updates on financial performance are reported on a quarterly basis during the year as part of the Council's Performance Report. The Director added that Members may wish to consider further information requirements on the level of subsidy across Council services as part of scrutinising the Council's quarterly Performance Report.

In relation to the Council Tax Reduction Scheme (CTRS), the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee requested clarity on whether the roll-out of Universal Credit will impact on the Council's Council Tax Reduction Scheme (CTRS). The Director of Financial Services advised Members that whilst both schemes are separate, with the CTRS administered by the Council and Universal Credit administered by the Department for Work and Pensions, the Council is mindful of the potential risk of delays in Universal Credit claimants receiving payments. The Director went on to remind Members that following the Committee providing feedback at its December 2018 meeting (as part of the budget consultation process) to support the backdating of CTRS claims from 3 months to 6 months, this

proposal was subsequently agreed by Council in January 2019. The Director added that this change will help minimise any council tax liability accrued because of delays in people receiving payments of Universal Credit.

With regard to Council Tax, a Member highlighted the importance of clearly communicating to the public the respective increases in council tax that relate to the Council, South Wales Police and Crime commissioner and Community Councils where applicable.

A Member supported the investment in state of the art technology at the Materials Recovery Facility and, in addition to the estimated budget saving, considered the development will have a positive impact on the Council's recycling performance.

The Vice-Chair requested clarity on whether the Transformation Reserve represented additional funding and how it was topped up. The Director of Financial Services indicated that the Council's approach to budget setting is an on-going process and as savings are identified early and implemented in-year, the one-off cash saved is allocated to the Transformation Reserve and represents additional one-off funding for the Council. The Director added that in addition to the in-year cash benefit of this approach, the permanent base budget savings are then included in the proposed budget strategy for the following year.

A Member referred the Committee to the Budget Consultation Outcomes and in particular the feedback from consultees that showed the Music Service receiving the largest percentage decrease in average budget. The Member emphasised the importance of the Music Service as being a key part of the overall education offer for young people and indicated that the Council should not make any budget cuts in this area.

In conclusion, the Director of Financial Services stated that the views of Members of this Committee would be fed back to Cabinet at its meeting in February 2019, which would be incorporated into the 2019/20 Revenue Budget Strategy Report to full Council in March 2019.

The Chair thanked the Director of Financial Services for his in depth report.

Following a discussion, Members **RESOLVED**;

- To acknowledge the content of the Council's Draft 2019/20 Revenue Budget Strategy.
- To agree that the views expressed by Members, as set out above, are fed back to Cabinet in respect of budget strategy proposals.

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