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RHONDDA CYNON TAF

RCT Budget Consultation

2018/19 Budget Strategy

FIGURES AND TABLES

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- This report presents the findings of the General Budget Strategy Consultation for 2018/19. The report is a summary of the main points made during the process and separately all comments and suggestions will be passed to the relevant service managers.

- The Council faces a budget gap of approximately £3.8M for 2018/19. The consultation is an essential part of the budget setting process and assists the Cabinet with its deliberations.

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

  The methods of consultation included;

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

- Over 1500 people were engaged in the budget setting process.

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

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

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

- The services that received the <u>smallest</u> % decrease in average budget were;

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

- A 3% increase in Council Tax had been factored into the budget simulator as it was used for modelling purposes in calculating the budget gap of £3.8m. Taking this into account the average Council tax increase was reported to be 4.22%. In addition, 51.5% of respondents to the online questionnaire and roadshow participants suggested that they would be happy with an increase of over 3%. All members of the OPAG group agreed that a 3% rise was acceptable.

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

- The majority of respondents felt that the Council should focus on the key themes, especially Early Intervention and Prevention and Efficiency (89%).

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

- 83% of respondents agreed that the Council should continue its investment programme.

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

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

- There was widespread support for further investment in apprenticeships and the graduate schemes, with respondents expressing the importance of them for young people (and older people) and also a need for the Council and other businesses in the private sector to be involved.

- There were mixed opinions on the investment in roads, with respondents stating that they had seen improvements in certain areas, but there was a definite need for further investment. Potholes continue to be a perceived issue.

- A large number of positive responses were made by those respondents who use leisure services, including the investments in 3G pitches.

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

- When discussing the investment in streetscape in the town centres, the majority of people felt that this was a good idea and had made a difference. However, when discussing town centre regeneration more generally, comments were not always as positive, with many referring to a lack of shops and high business rates.

- The comments about the grants and loans for housing focussed upon using appropriate brownfield sites, that there are too many houses in some areas without the associated amenities and in other areas there were not enough houses.

- The schools budget is proposed to increase by £1million. Respondents were asked if they thought that this increase was reasonable for schools, 63% said they agreed.

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

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

1.   INTRODUCTION

1.1   This report presents the findings of the Annual Budget Strategy Consultation for 2018/19, which was undertaken to support the decision making process, required to set the Council's budget for the coming financial year.

1.2   Section 2 outlines some brief background to the consultation process.

1.3   Section 3 details the methodology.

1.4   Section 4 and 5 provide the results of the online budget simulator exercise and the accompanying questionnaire.

1.5   Section 6 presents the feedback received at the engagement roadshow events and the Older Persons Advisory Group meeting.

1.6   Section 7 provides some feedback from engagement with young people.

1.7   Section 8 provides the results of some questions posted on social media.

2.   BACKGROUND

2.1   For the financial year 2018/19 the Council must decide upon its Budget Strategy and priorities.

2.2   The Council faces an initial budget gap of approximately £3.8M for 2018/19, which it needs to reduce in order to meet the requirement of setting a legally balanced budget.

2.3   The consultation is an essential part of the budget setting process and assists the Cabinet with its deliberations, prior to constructing the final revenue budget strategy for the financial year ending 31st March 2019.

2.4   The Council has already undertaken thorough spending reviews but has not yet made a final decision. The purpose of the consultation was therefore to seek the views of the residents of Rhondda Cynon Taf.

2.5   The consultation process aimed to provide residents with enough information on the Council's budget, including where and how the Council's money is spent, to enable people to more easily understand and take part in the budget engagement.

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

3.   METHODOLOGY

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

3.2   The aims of the consultation were to;

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

3.3   The following methods were used to consult with stakeholders;

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

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

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

3.5   The following engagement events took place during the consultation;

Member led Events

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

Town Centre Roadshows

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

Libraries

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

Leisure Centres

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

3.6   The Town Centre events were held in the Council's Environmental Services trailer vehicle. Members of the public were invited into the trailer to have a discussion with Officers and Members about the Council's budget, investments and any problems or queries they may have had. Budget boards were designed to create an interactive activity for people to leave comments and ideas and these were noted for this report.

3.7   The RCT County Wide Youth Forum discussed the budget through interactive keypads and a discussion led by a Council Officer.

3.8   Discussions were also held with a meeting of the Older Persons' Advisory Group (OPAG) on the 22nd November 2017.

3.9   All responses and comments will be made available to Cabinet Members and Officers to aid decision making.

3.10   Over 1500 people were engaged in the budget setting process.

4.   BUDGET SIMULATOR RESULTS

Responses received

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

The Overall Budget

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

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

Table 1: The overall budget

Overall Summary of Services

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

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

Table 2: Overall summary of all services

4.4   The **top 10 services** that received the <u>largest</u> % decrease in average budget were;

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

Table 3: Services receiving largest % decrease in average budget

4.5   The services that received the <u>smallest</u> % decrease in average budget were;

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

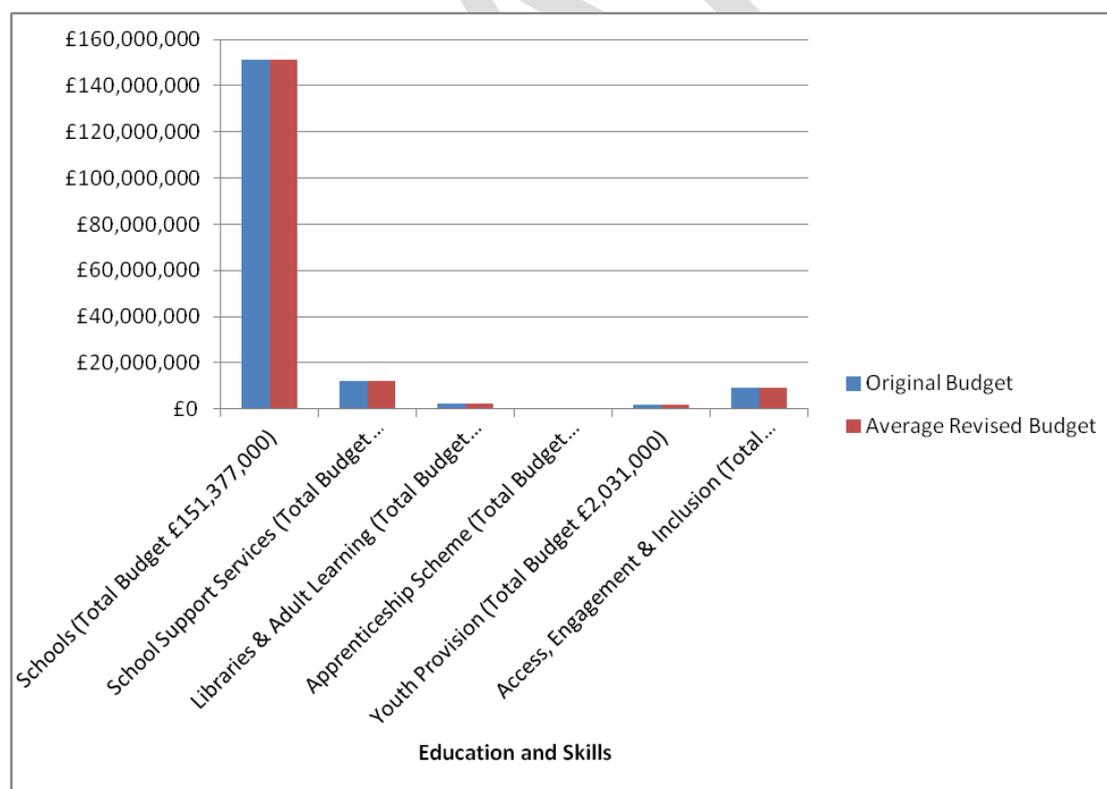**Table 4: Services receiving smallest % decrease in average budget**

Analysis by Service Groups

Education and Skills

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

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

Table 5: Average change % for Education and Skills

Figure 1 –Education and Skills Budget Change

Education and Skills Comments

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

Schools

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

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

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

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

Other comments on the schools budget included;

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

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

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

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

Apprenticeships

"Apprenticeships are the way forward. There are too many people going to University and getting into debt or can't afford to go or even don't really want to go but they don't have many other option".
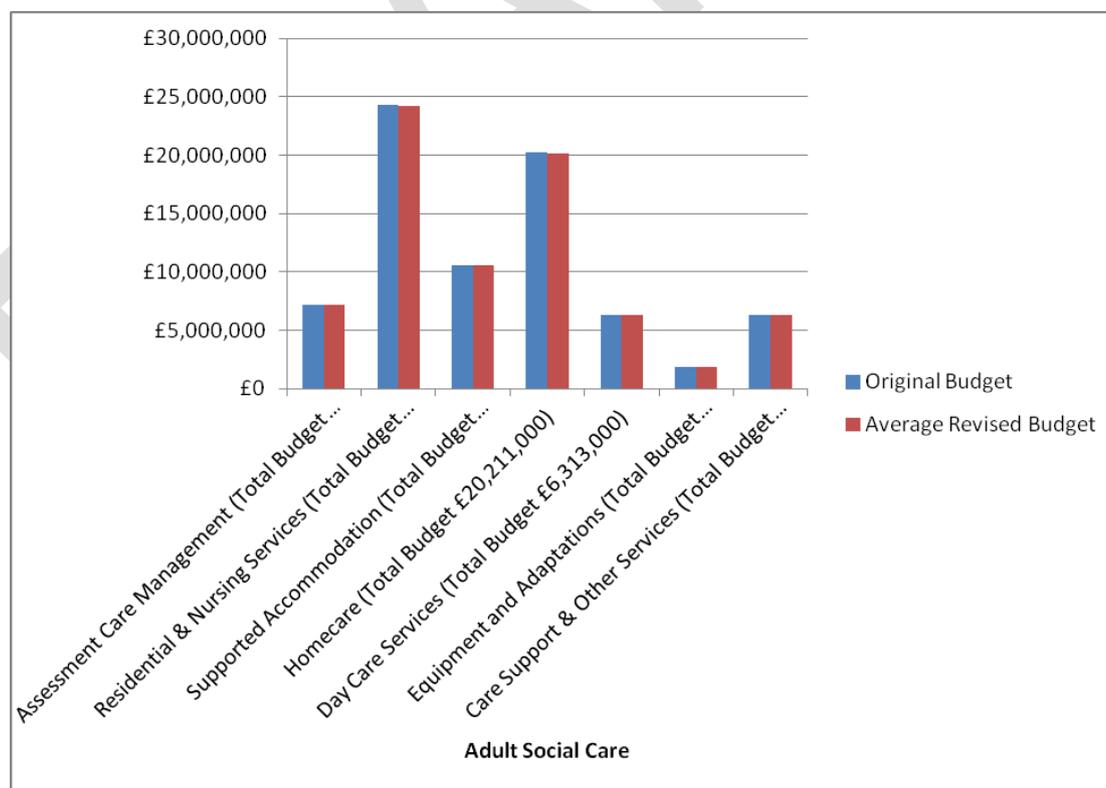
"An increase in the apprenticeship scheme would provide greater opportunities for young people to develop skills that will assist in gaining employment and contributing further to the local community".

Adult Social Care

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

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

Table 6: Average change % for Adult Social Care

Figure 2 –Adult Social Care Budget Change

<u>Adult and Social Care comments</u>

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

<u>Overall</u>

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

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

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

<u>Independent Living</u>

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

"Reducing supported accommodation and day care services would limit opportunities for some, however no reductions in other areas would still allow for people to have assistance in living independently ensuring that their basic needs are still being met."
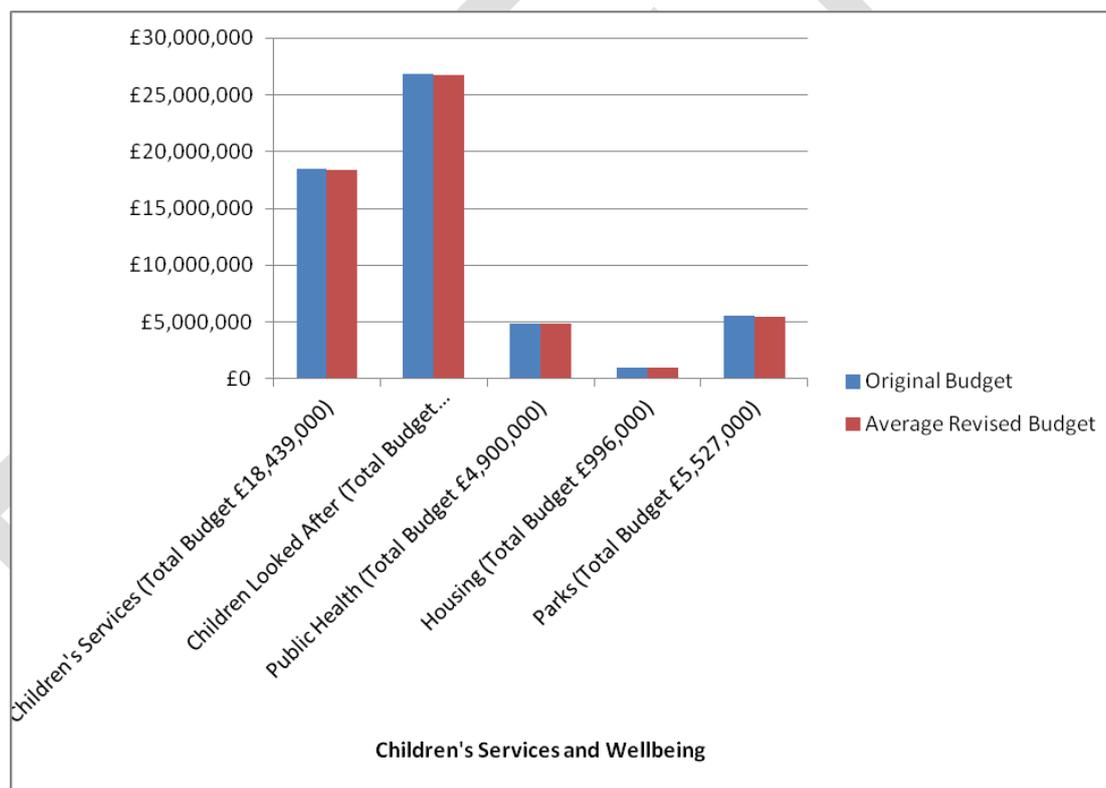
<u>Equipment & Adaptations</u>

"Councils give equipment, aids and adaptations too freely".

Children's Services and Wellbeing

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

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

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

Figure 3 –Children's Services and Wellbeing Budget Change

Children's Services and Wellbeing comments

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

Overall

"Can't reduce these services any further."

Children's Services

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

Parks

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

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

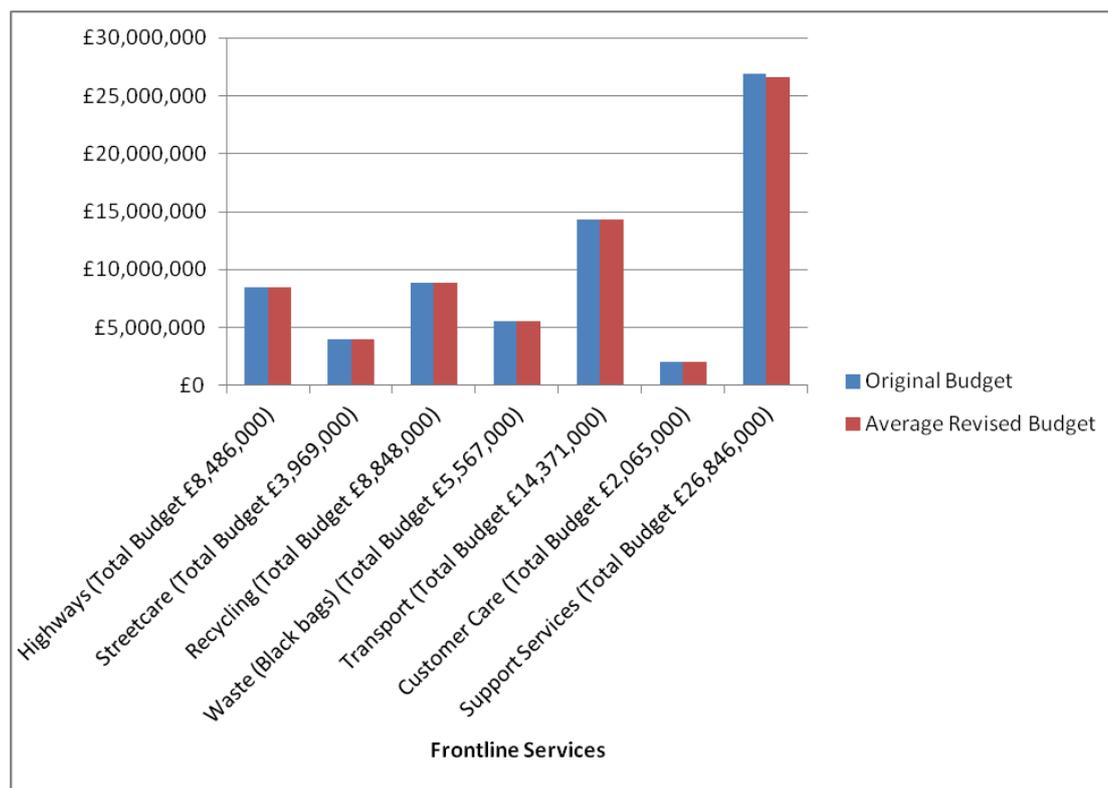"Parks and play areas have already had enough investment in them"

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

Frontline Services

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

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

Table 8: Average change % for Frontline Services

Figure 4 - Frontline Services Budget Change

Frontline Services comments

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

General

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

Recycling

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

"Collect and separate more efficiently at recycling plants"

"Recycling has become the norm for most households"

Waste

"collect black bags every 3 wks not 2wks"

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

"Waste black bag collection increase to 3 wks."

Transport

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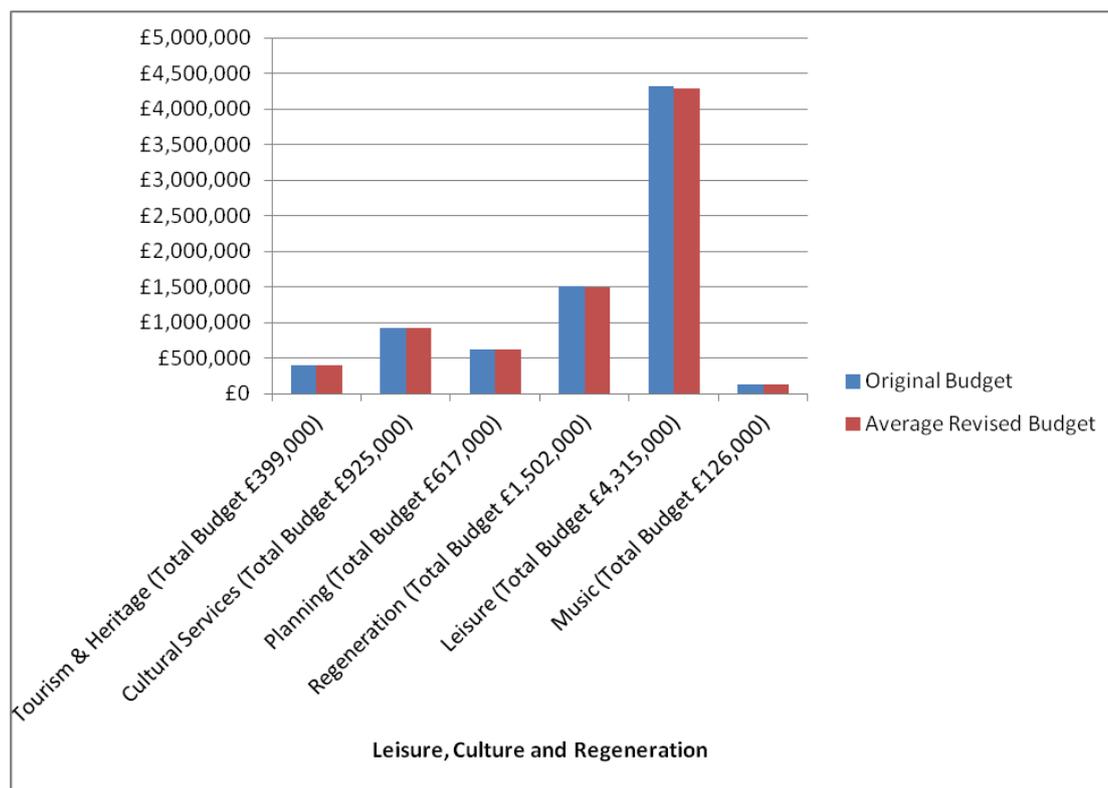
Customer Care

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

Leisure Culture and Regeneration

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

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

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

Figure 5: Leisure, Culture and Regeneration Budget Change

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

Leisure, Culture and Regeneration comments

Overall

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

"Those individuals who use these facilities should pay a little extra"

Tourism

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

Regeneration

*"Economic regeneration is not discretionary anymore, because of the
Wellbeing of Future Generations Act....."*

Leisure

"Leisure has been greatly improved."

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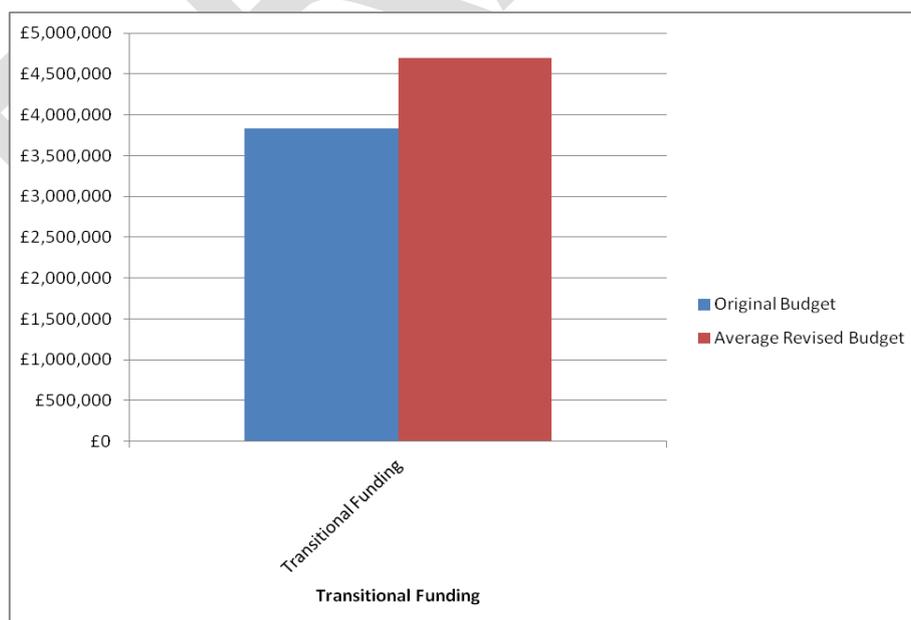
Libraries

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

Music

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

Transitional Funding

4.16   Respondents who completed the budget simulator felt that the budget gap, at least in part could use some of the transitional funding available.   Respondents had the option of using 0%, 50% or 100% of the transitional funding of £3.8M available. The average percentage change suggested was an increase of 22.46% which would result in using additional transitional funding of £860,928.

Figure 6: Transitional Funding

Comments on Transitional Funding

4.17 The following are a selection of comments;

"Do what you need to do to protect services"

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

"If it maintains service levels and helps towards areas that need funding then this would be a choice…"

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

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

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

Council Tax

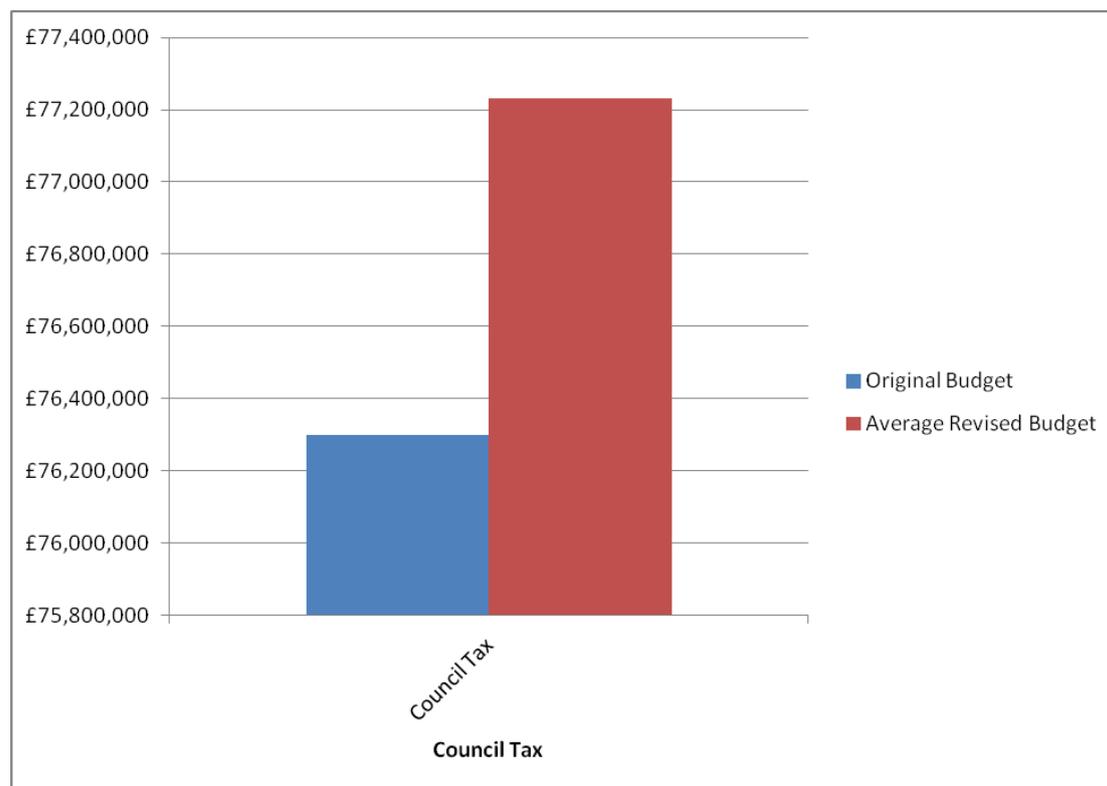4.18 A 3% increase in Council Tax had been factored in to the budget simulator as it was used for modelling purposes in calculating the budget gap of £3.8m. Taking this into account the average % change increase in Council tax was reported to be 4.22%.

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

Table 10: Average change % for Council Tax

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

Figure 7: Income from Council Tax

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

Those in favour of an increase;

"5% max"

"Around 3% to 4%"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Communication

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

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

5.   Questionnaire Results

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

Council Tax

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

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

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

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

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

A selection of comments can be found below.

Agree

"Hold council tax increases to under 4% max"

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

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

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

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

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

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

Disagree

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

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

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

The Council's Priorities

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Council Investment Opportunities

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

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

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

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

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

Overall/Other

"Good to see the investments being made across rct"

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

Education - Improving School Facilities

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

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

Highways – Road improvements

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

"Yes roads seem better than a few years ago

"Yes roads seem better but only in some areas

Regeneration

"Regeneration of towns and village centres"

Leisure/3G

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

"Leisure Centres and Parks and Play Areas."

"Sports centre investment has been very positive"

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

Play areas

"Play area investment is making a difference"

"lovely to see new parks for children"

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

"Yes play areas in my area have been improved"

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

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

The Schools Budget

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

Is this increase reasonable for schools?

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

Table 12 – The School Budget

Fees and Charges

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

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

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

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

Table 13 – Fees and Charges

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

Some comments included;

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

"Increases by no more than inflation"

"I think all should be increased by RPI"

"Inflation is 3.5% so keep charges at inflation or below"

"Keep price increases in line with or below inflation"

Any other comments;

Respondents were given a final opportunity to provide comments

Reducing the costs of Managers and Councillors

"Cull of officers as Service Manager, Head of Service, Service Director, Group Director level"

"Reduce back office functions and management structures."

Efficiency Savings

"Increase mobile working and allow Internet Facing Deployments."

Suggested Budget priorities

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

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

"*Outsource legal and HR departments*"

6. ENGAGEMENT EVENTS

6.1   This section outlines the results of the consultation discussions held in the town centres, leisure centres and libraries along with feedback received from the OPAG meeting.

6.2   A large number of engagement events were held right across Rhondda Cynon Taf, the details of which are found in the methodology.

6.3   The Roadshow events and the meetings that were held are part of the Council's ongoing approach to face to face resident engagement.

6.4   The events used a number of boards to aid discussion and a number of discussion prompts were available to the facilitators.

PART A Results – Council Investment Areas

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

Education - School Facilities

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

Positive

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

Investment

"Better facilities, more opportunities."

"Need to invest in schools"

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

"Keep investing in schools & apprenticeships"

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

<u>21st Century schools</u>

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

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

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

<u>Quality of education</u>

"Our future is in the hands of the schools"

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

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

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

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

<u>Other</u>

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

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

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

"Nobody better than RCT in school facilities"

"Increase provision for SEN"

<u>Negative</u>

<u>21st Century Schools / size of schools</u>

"Schools can get too big"

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

"Small schools work better as children feel more secure"

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

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

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

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

<u>Investment needed</u>

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

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

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

Apprenticeships/Graduates

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

Some comments included:

"Increase number of apprenticeships"

"Good idea – try and develop with private businesses"

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

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

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

"More manual apprenticeships, bricklaying etc, 1 year of training isn't enough"

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

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

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

"Apprenticeships should be available to older people, they need to train older people"

"Should be more for disabled young people"

Road Improvements

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

Visible improvements

"Visible improvement in road resurfacing, more investment needed."

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

"Mountain road works have improved the area"

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

"Good roads – better gritting – side streets"

"Happy with changes in Carne Street"

<u>Continue with further investment</u>

"Continue to invest in roads, resurfacing"

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

"Pavements and roads need doing"

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

"More Capital investment in roads"

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

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

<u>Potholes / resurfacing</u>

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

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

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

"Pothole improvement – invest in new pothole filling machines"

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

"So many potholes, roads are terrible"

Parking / obstructions / car parks

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

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

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

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

Road closures

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

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

Transport

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

"No direct bus to Cardiff or Swansea from Aberdare"

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

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

"Better transport lately"

"Transport – trains are terrible"

Cycling tracks

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

"Cycle paths – invest in cycle paths"

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

Leisure Centres/3G pitches

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

Visible improvements / happy with investment

"Happy with investment"

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

"Leisure centres have been invested in loads"

"Happy with leisure services, I use Abercynon & Aberdare, Hawthorn"

"Leisure – promote good health to reduce health service costs"

"Leisure centre investment – good for areas / residents"

"Investment in Leisure Centres – they're doing really well – free swim, I think is good"

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

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

Swimming pool / swimming lessons

"Free swimming lessons are brilliant – it's important"

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

"School contracts – swimming lessons – keeping pool open"

"More help for swim clubs funding"

"Invest in swimming pools"

3G pitches

"3G pitches good idea"

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

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

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

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

Leisure for Life card / membership / costs

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

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

"Improve leisure for Life card"

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

More investment needed

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

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

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

"Leisure facilities needed for Mountain Ash"

"Ongoing rooms need investment particularly Ystrad"

"Leisure centres need to be more innovative with investment. Too many gyms – need new things like climbing walls & ski slopes. Agree with 3G pitches."

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

<u>Health suite</u>

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

"What's the point in going to the sauna if you can't use the pool?"

"Shouldn't be closing saunas etc in LC's"

Play Areas

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

<u>Positive</u>

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

"Can see the investment being made in play areas."

"Play area good, just been done"

"Ponty park + Aberdare park are brilliant + the staff are great."

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

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

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

"For a long time, stuff was all the same, it's all changed now and it's marvellous"

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

Negative

"Could be improved more"

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

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

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

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

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

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

Other

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

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

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

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

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

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

Regeneration of Town Centres

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

Positive

"Happy with current regeneration"

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

"All for the regeneration of Tonypandy"

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

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

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

"Regeneration of shops incentive for people to shop locally"

6.12   Although there were some issues identified with the paving;

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

Negative

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"People like to go to Supermarkets"

"Town centres – lower parking charges, free parking"

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

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

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

"Town centres – variety of types of shop"

Housing

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

Appropriate sites (Brownfield sites)

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

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

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

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

Too many houses – not enough amenities

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

"Don't take any more, to many houses going up in Talbot Green"

"Too many houses in Aberdare, not enough shops"

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

"If you're going to build all these houses, you need to have enough amenities to go with it"

Not enough housing

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

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

"More housing needed for regeneration – Council need infrastructure where planning"

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

"People with disabilities are having to move miles from family as there isn't housing for them"

Homelessness

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

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

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

Assistance for first time buyers / information on grants

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

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

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

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

Standards of housing / buildings

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

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

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

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

Strategic Projects

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

Cross Valley link

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

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

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

"Cross valley link will benefit the area"

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

<u>Lido</u>

"Lido – can afford £1"

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

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

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

"More for children, Lido booking is ridiculous."

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

<u>Taff Vale Precinct</u>

"Needs more shops in the Taff Vale Development"

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

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

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

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

"Car parking should be available at the precinct"

<u>Overall</u>

"Anything to help regenerate access is good to see"

"If money is there then happy with it"

"Happy with A4119+ bypass proposals"

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

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

"As long as it brings investment + jobs"

"Happy to invest if they are beneficial to people"

"Viability issues with strategic projects in Pontypridd"

"Will make no difference"

"Pontyclun park & ride, needs expansion"

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

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

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

<u>Overall (All investment areas)</u>

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

PART B Results – Key Areas

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

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

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

Digitalisation

Online services

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

Council Employees

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

- *"More agile ways of working would be a good thing"*

Face to Face Services

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

People not online

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

Early Intervention and Prevention

"We've got to deliver things differently" (OPAG)

Positive

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

Community Hubs

- *"Community Hub – agree but need to market properly"*
- *"Community hubs – need better consultation with services already being offered by other organisations."*
- *"Good idea but why not use day centres"*
- *"Amalgamate everything into one place to make it easier for people, community centres could help health authority by having clinics etc all in one place"*

- *"Consider the buildings in the community, how would people get to the Hub? This could be done in the valleys small villages but consider carefully, Abercynon would be great, utilise library"*
- *"Community hubs would be a good idea as long as there's transport. People need regular transport esp if the doctors surgery is in there"*
- *"Would be nice to have the libraries involved at the heart of it"*

Extra Care Homes

- *"Publicise more about what facilities are available for more mature residents. Extra care, sheltered accomm telecare."*

- *"Extra care homes would be fabulous"* (OPAG)

Suggestions

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

Commercialisation

Positive
- *"Good idea for investment"*

- *"Commercialisation and digitalisation go hand in hand"*
- *"This is important, put money into the Council, business support is essential"*
- *"Community would be more trusting of a service provided by the Council"*
- *"Commercialisation – totally agree with the council looking into this to raise further funds"*

Negative

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

Specific Examples

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

Financial

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

Efficiency

General

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

Specific suggestions

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

Streetcare & Waste services

- *"Collect less regularly (waste) fortnightly but could do 3 / 4 weeks"*
- *"Less waste refuse collections monthly"*
- *"Recycling waste contaminated bags, not saving money – needs more enforcement"*
- *"Collect all rubbish using only1 lorry instead of 3 waste of money"*
- *"Fly tipping must add up to a lot, maybe scrap charges for white goods etc"*
- *"Could recycling come into it? Less bin collections?"*
- *"Invest in enforcement officers to tackle dog fouling which will cut down on cleaning for the council, fine people on the first instance"*

Independence

Positive

- *"Agree entirely with this, more facilities to help people to get out and about"*
- *"Want to be self maintained, not to put pressure on services"*
- *"Independence is great, good to invest"*

- *"Long run it will be cheaper for Council + they will be happier"*
- *"Good idea, but support services have to be there e.g. home care and different support level of workers."*

Suggestions

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

Extra Care Homes

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

Council Tax

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

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

Table 14 – Council Tax level of increase

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

<u>Those in agreement with an increase in Council Tax</u>

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

<u>Those who disagree with an increase in Council Tax</u>

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

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

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

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

7.   YOUNG PERSON ENGAGEMENT EVENT

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

7.2   The following schools/youth Forums sent representatives;

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

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

Programme for the event:

4.15pm   Welcome and Introductions - Cllr Leyshon

4.20pm   Ice breaker – Stacey Oliver

4.35pm   Youth Parliament Update – Andrew Burrows and MYPs
- *MYM Results*
- *Parliament Debate*
- *YEPS Pledge to RCT Results*

4.55pm   County Youth Forum Consultation Update – Sarah Evans

5.10pm   RCT Budget Consultation – James Whitehurst
- Video
- *Interactive consultation*

5.30pm   Mental Health Subgroup Feedback – Young Person
- *Update on on-going work and*
- *Comments/Questions from the forum*

5.40pm   Anti Bullying Subgroup Feedback – Young Person
- *Update on on-going work and*
- *Comments/Questions from the forum*

5.50pm   Feedback and Evaluations- Cllr. Leyshon
Confirmation of Chair/Secretary Ballot
Evaluation of CYF
Future Dates

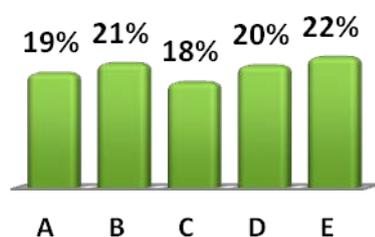**6.00pm**   Thank you and Close – Cllr. Leyshon

Feedback

7.4   The following section outlines some of the feedback received.

5 Key Areas

Rank these in order of 1-5 that you think are most important, 1 being the most important and 5 being the least important.
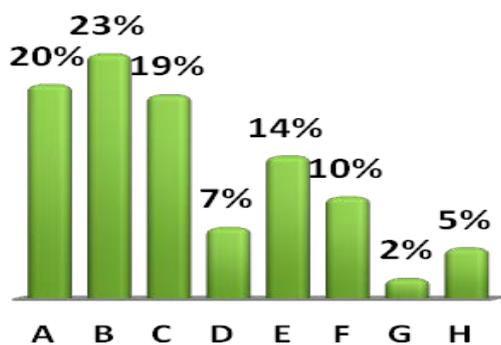
A	Digitalisation	200	19%
B	Early Intervention and Prevention	217	21%
C	Commercialisation	184	18%
D	Efficiency	213	20%
E	Independence	228	22%
		1042	**100%**

Investment Areas

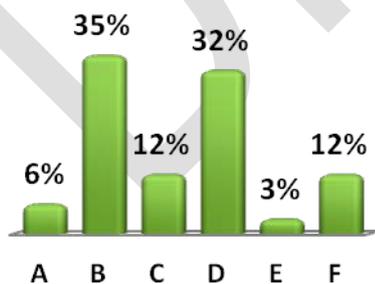Do you think the council should continue to invest in these areas? Pick the four most important

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

Council Tax Year

What do you think should happen with next year's council tax?

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

72

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

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

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

Comments included:

"Not reasonable"

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

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

The Council's Priorities

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

Council investment opportunities

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

Education
"Schools should have days where they teach young people how they would make plans to buy a house / apply for a job, what taxes are etc."
"The school has a community Hub where they charge other schools."
"Further investment in the libraries."
"Ton library was so nice, the nearest now is Treorchy."

Youth services
"Cwmparc is a rough area, the young people that go to the youth club there are doing so much better. This should be an area that the Council should invest in – it could come under Early Intervention & Prevention."
"RCT should make a boys club out of closed down schools. Pupils with behavioural problems go to youth clubs etc, they are doing better."

Highways
"Ton Pentre – speed bumps that don't need to be there, there's no Primary school there – waste of money."
"Tonypandy traffic lights by ASDA – people get stuck when too much traffic goes through and the lights go red."
"Treorchy by the Stag – the traffic lights are too busy, when they're working it's worse."

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

Strategic projects
"The paddling pool – shame they're not opening anymore."
"The Lido is good – reasonable prices."
"They should bring back Ponty in the park event, bring more events in Rhondda, and bring in revenue through events."

Leisure
"Ystrad leisure centre is quite nice now."

Play areas
"Play areas are unsafe around here."

8.   Social Media Feedback

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

8.2   The following results were received;

Budget Poll Results

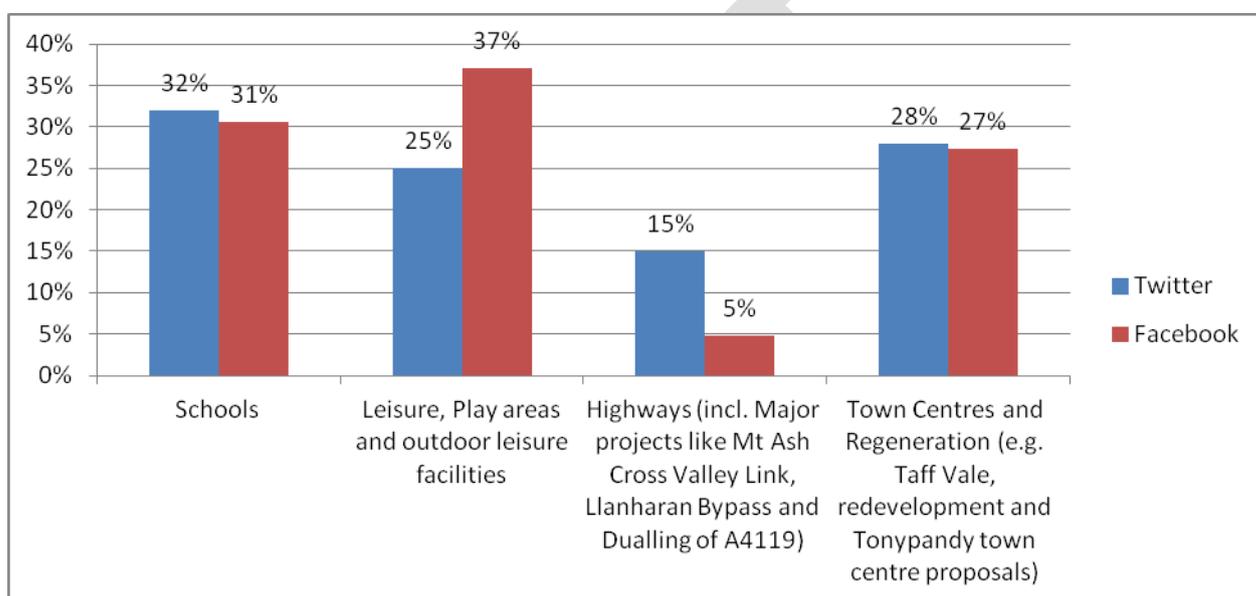**Poll 1 - The Council is investing in a range of areas through #RCTinvest, which area is the most important to you?**
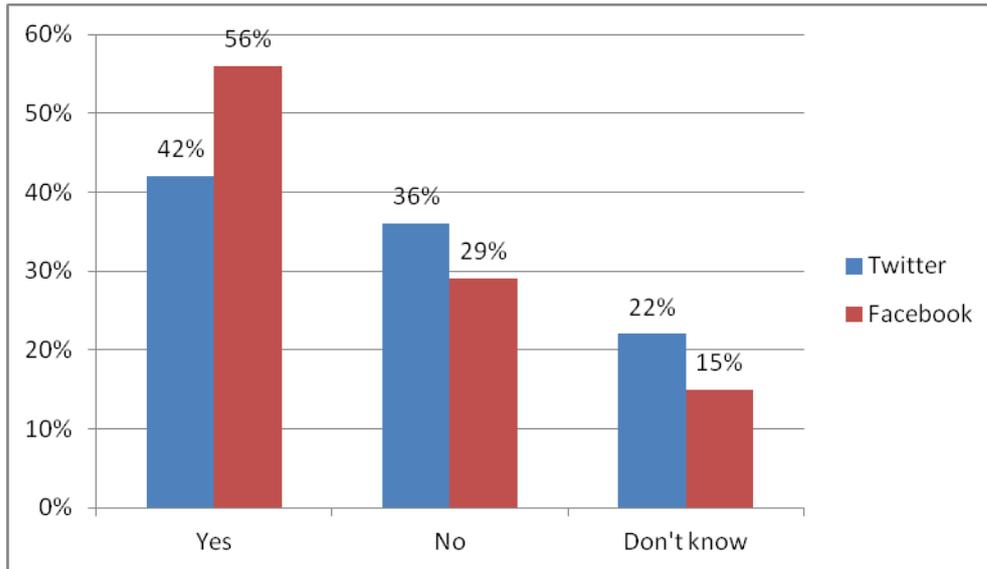

Figure 8 – Areas of importance for investment

Poll 2

To ensure the Council can continue to maintain and improve services in the face of continued cuts to public sector funding we are focusing on the following areas:
- Early Intervention and Prevention
- Digitalisation
- Promoting Independence
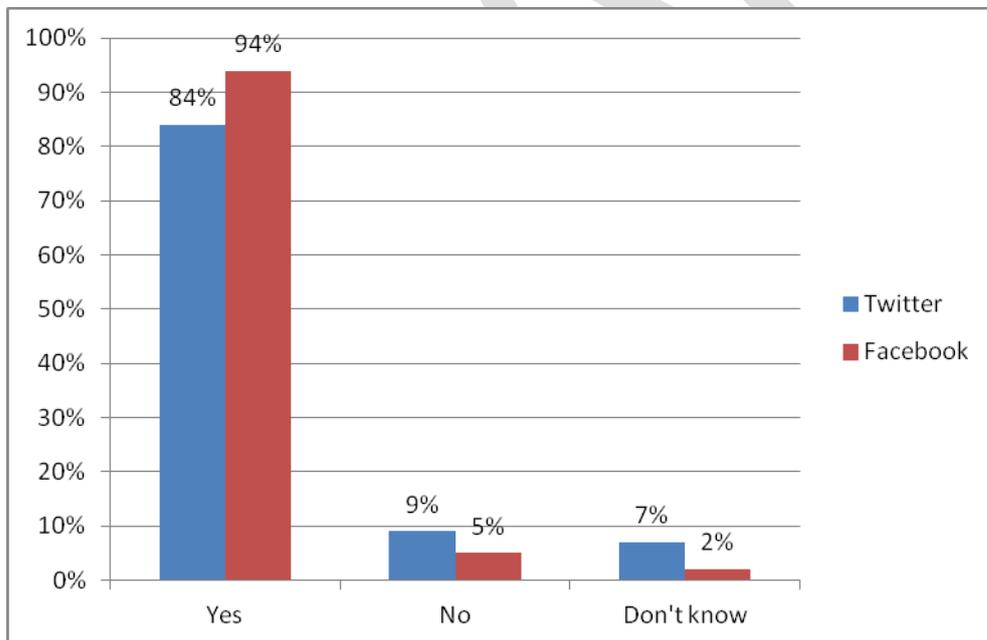- Efficiency
- Commercialisation

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

Figure 9 – Agreement of Council focus on 5 key areas

Poll 3

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

Figure 10 – Agreement with proposal to protect school budget

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