



CYNGOR BWRDEISTREF SIROL
RHONDDA CYNON TAF
COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

**A meeting of the CABINET will be held at the Council Chamber, The Pavilions,
Cambrian Park, Clydach Vale, Tonypany, CF40 2XX
Thursday, 23rd January, 2020 at 10.30 am**

Contact: Hannah Williams - Council Business Unit (Tel No. 01443 424062)

Councillors and members of the public wishing to request the facility to address the Cabinet on any of the business as listed below, must request to do so by 5pm on the Tuesday, 21 January 2020 Councillors and Members of the public should stipulate if this address will be in the medium of English or Welsh.

It must be noted that the facility to address the Cabinet is at the discretion of the Chair and each request will be considered based on the agenda items being considered, the public interest/interest of the member in each matter and the demands of the business on that day. To make such a request please email:- ExecutiveandRegulatoryBusinessUnit@rctcbc.gov.uk

ITEMS FOR CONSIDERATION

1. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

To receive disclosures of personal interest from Members in accordance with the Code of Conduct

Note:

1. Members are requested to identify the item number and subject matter that their interest relates to and signify the nature of the personal interest: and
2. Where Members withdraw from a meeting as a consequence of the disclosure of a prejudicial interest they must notify the Chairman when they leave.

2. MINUTES

To receive the minutes of the Cabinet Committee on the 17th December 2019 as an accurate record.

(Pages 5 - 12)

3. LEADER'S SCHEME OF DELEGATION

To receive the [Leaders Scheme of Delegation](#) following the recent amendments which include:

- Councillor Christina Leyshon as the new Cabinet Member for Adult & Children's Services;
- Councillor Rhys Lewis as the new Cabinet Member for Communities, Culture and the Welsh Language;
- Early Years Education taken forward by the Cabinet Member for Education and Inclusion Services; and
- Youth Services and Engagement taken forward by the Leader of the Council.

4. RECYCLING WITHIN RCT - RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE CLIMATE CHANGE STEERING GROUP

To receive the report of the Service Director, Democratic Services and Communication, which provides the Cabinet with the recommendations of the Climate Change Cabinet Steering Group, which considered a report on the recycling performance for the first 6 months of 2019/20, the new Materials Recovery Facility, future developments at Bryn Pica and potential legislative changes.

(Pages 13 - 20)

5. TAFFS WELL THERMAL SPRING - RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE CLIMATE CHANGE STEERING GROUP

To receive the report of the Service Director, Democratic Services and Communication, which provides the Cabinet with the recommendations of the Climate Change Cabinet Steering Group, which considered a report on the current situation with regards to the Taffs Well Spring Renewable Energy Project.

(Pages 21 - 28)

6. NATIONAL ADOPTION SERVICE WALES ANNUAL REPORT 2018-2019

To receive the report of the Group Director, Community and Children's Services, which provides the Cabinet with the National Adoption Service Wales Annual Report 2018-2019.

(Pages 29 - 56)

7. DELEGATE AUTHORITY TO ENFORCE THE PROVISIONS OF THE RENTING OF HOMES (FEES ETC) (WALES) ACT 2019

To receive the report of the Director, Public Health, Protection and Community Services, which seeks Cabinet's approval to delegate authority to the Director of Public Health, Protection and Community Services and to the single Licensing Authority in Wales (Rent Smart Wales) to use the enforcement powers of the Renting of Homes (Fees etc) (Wales) Act 2019.

(Pages 57 - 62)

8. THE COUNCIL'S 2020/2021 REVENUE BUDGET

To receive the report of the Director, Finance and Services, which provides the Cabinet with information in respect of the 2020/2021 local government settlement and the outcomes of the budget consultation phase 1 exercise, to assist with its deliberations in formulating the revenue budget strategy for the financial year 2020/21, which it will recommend to Council, for approval.

(Pages 63 - 140)

9. TO CONSIDER PASSING THE FOLLOWING RESOLUTION:

"That the press and public be excluded from the meeting under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act (as amended) for the following items of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of the exempt information as defined in paragraph 14 of Part 4 of the Schedule 12A of the Act".

10. CORPORATE ASSET MANAGEMENT PLAN INTERIM UPDATE

To receive the report of the Director, Corporate Services, which provides Cabinet with the progress against the key themes of the Corporate Asset Management Plan 2018/23.

(Pages 141 - 162)

11. WRITE OFF OF IRRECOVERABLE DEBTS

To receive the report of the Director, Finance and Services, which provides Members with a position statement on irrecoverable debt and identifies the requirement to write-off certain amounts in accordance with strict review criteria.

(Pages 163 - 180)

12. URGENT ITEMS

To consider any urgent business as the Chairman feels appropriate.



Service Director of Democratic Services & Communication

Circulation:-

Councillors: Councillor A Morgan (Chair)
Councillor M Webber (Vice-Chair)
Councillor R Bevan
Councillor A Crimmings
Councillor M Norris
Councillor J Rosser
Councillor R Lewis
Councillor C Leyshon

Officers: Chris Bradshaw, Chief Executive
Christian Hanagan, Service Director of Democratic Services & Communication
Gio Isingrini, Group Director Community & Children's Services
Nigel Wheeler, Group Director – Prosperity, Development & Frontline Services
Paul Mee, Director, Public Health, Protection & Community Services
David Powell, Director of Corporate Estates
Richard Evans, Director of Human Resources
Simon Gale, Director of Prosperity & Development
Andy Wilkins (Legal), Director of Legal Services
Barrie Davies, Director of Finance & Digital Services
Gaynor Davies, Director of Education and Inclusion Services
Derek James, Service Director – Prosperity & Development

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNCIL CABINET

Minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on Tuesday, 17 December 2019 at 10.30 am at the Council Chamber, The Pavilions, Cambrian Park, Clydach Vale, Tonypany, CF40 2XX.

County Borough Councillors - Cabinet Members in attendance:-

Councillor A Morgan (Chair)

Councillor M Webber	Councillor R Bevan
Councillor A Crimmings	Councillor G Hopkins
Councillor M Norris	Councillor J Rosser
Councillor R Lewis	Councillor C Leyshon

Officers in attendance

Mr C Bradshaw, Chief Executive
Mr C Hanagan, Service Director of Democratic Services & Communication
Mr G Isingrini, Group Director Community & Children's Services
Mr N Wheeler, Group Director – Prosperity, Development & Frontline Services
Mr P Mee, Director, Public Health, Protection & Community Services
Mr S Gale, Director of Prosperity & Development
Mr A Wilkins, Director of Legal Services
Mr B Davies, Director of Finance & Digital Services
Ms G Davies, Director of Education and Inclusion Services
Mr D James, Service Director – Prosperity & Development
Ms W Edwards, Service Director – Community Services

Others in attendance

Councillor J Brencher
Councillor H Fychan

80 Declaration of Interest

In accordance with the Council Code of Conduct, the following declarations were made:

- County Borough Councillor H Fychan declared a personal interest in respect of items 3 and 11 of the agenda: 'I am a former Trustee of the Muni and a Board Member of Artis Community'
- County Borough Councillor J Brencher declared a personal interest in respect of items 3 and 11 of the agenda: 'I am a Trustee of the YMCA'

81 Minutes

It was **RESOLVED** to approve, as an accurate reflection, the minutes of the meeting held on 21st November 2019.

Community Asset Transfer - Muni Arts Centre

Following the Cabinet's decision on the 18th June 2019 to take forward a tenancy with Awen Cultural Trust, the Director, Public Health, Protection and Community Services introduced the report to Members, which sought to provide an update on the progress in respect of the community asset transfer of the Muni Arts Centre by way of a leasehold transfer. The Director informed Members that Awen had been working with the Council to determine the short term capital requirements to re-open the Muni in June 2020 and that the requirements, once identified, would be included in the Council's future capital investment programme.

With the aid of a PowerPoint presentation, Awen Cultural Trust provided the Cabinet with the long term proposals for the refurbishment and restoration of the building. Awen reiterated the value of the creative industries in supporting the economy and the positive affects it can have on health and wellbeing.

Awen Cultural Trust spoke of the heritage of the building and the constraints of the internal decoration, which did not compliment it. The long term plans included the reinstatement of the internal features, along with improving the capacity issues and accessibility for disabled actors and audience members.

The Cabinet Member for Stronger Communities, Well-being and Cultural Services thanked Awen Cultural Trust for the ambitious and impressive plans, commenting that a lot of work had gone in to producing the exciting vision before Members. The Cabinet Member continued by praising the officers for their commitment to ensuring the building is put back into use to the benefit of the residents of RCT. The Cabinet Member spoke of the wellbeing benefits, which are derived from the Arts and commented that the Eisteddfod would feed into any proposals.

The Leader also took the opportunity to thank Awen and the Service Director for the impressive plans and commented that the target for reopening would be June 2020. The Leader spoke of the YMCA Pontypridd and commented that the two venues would complement and strengthen one another. The Leader went on to speak of the Cabinet's difficult decision to close the building, in order to use the reduced Local Government settlement for social services and other key services for the residents of RCT, but was pleased to note that the Council's RCT Together Programme had since evolved and had been used by Welsh Government as an example of best practice.

The Deputy Leader voiced her support and praised the vision, commenting on the openness and transparency of the presentation. The Deputy Leader spoke of other Council facilities in the Pontypridd area, such as the new footbridge and Lido, and felt that it would all benefit the residents of the wider area and bring tourism from the cities.

The Cabinet Member Children and Young People commented on the great transport links in Pontypridd and hoped to see Pontypridd Youth Club provision included within the future programme.

With the agreement of the Leader, as Chairman of the Committee, County Borough Councillors J. Brencher and H. Fychan spoke on the item.

The Cabinet **RESOLVED:**

1. To note the progress made with negotiations with Awen Cultural Trust to agree the terms of the lease and the necessary financial support requirements to secure a sustainable future for the Muni Arts Centre;
2. To receive a presentation from Awen Cultural Trust and their architects, Purcell, setting out their proposals for the refurbishment and restoration of the Muni Arts Centre;
3. That longer term proposals for the restoration of the Muni Arts Centre will be the subject of open consultation and engagement with the local community where necessary; and
4. That the Council will seek to engage with the local community where necessary in respect of the longer term proposals for the restoration of the Muni Arts Centre.

83 Cabinet Work Programme

The Service Director of Democratic Services and Communication provided Cabinet Members with a draft work programme for the 2019-20 Municipal Year, which listed matters requiring consideration by Cabinet. The Service Director commented that utilising the programme assists with openness and transparency of the decision making process within the Council and gives greater opportunity for Pre-Scrutiny.

Members were referred to Appendix 1 of the report and were advised that the programme is a live document to allow for any additional / deletion of reports throughout the year. The Service Director added that the consultation outcomes in respect of residential care, as earlier agreed by Members at the days meeting would be added to the work programme going forward.

The Deputy Leader welcomed the programme. It was **RESOLVED:**

1. To approve the Cabinet Work Programme for the 2019-20 Municipal Year and to receive a further update on a 3 monthly basis

84 Biodiversity Duty - Recommendations of the Climate Change Cabinet Steering Group

The Service Director of Democratic Services and Communication provided Cabinet Members with the recommendations of the Climate Change Cabinet Steering Group, which considered a report on the progress in discharging the Council's Biodiversity Duty.

The Service Director advised that the Climate Change Cabinet Steering Group met on the 18th November 2019, where they received a presentation, in conjunction with the report of the Director, Public Health, Protection and Community Services, which updated Members on the progress made in discharging the Council's Biodiversity Duty. Alongside Members and key officers were two external representatives from organisations, which have previously engaged with the Council in tackling the issues associated with climate change

The Steering Group were content that the action plan sought to address and monitor the key themes and resolved to recommend to Cabinet the submission of the report to Welsh Government.

The Cabinet Member for Environment, Leisure & Heritage Services thanked the officer for the report and commented that although the Council has a statutory duty to prepare a plan of action regarding the Biodiversity Duty, its importance is

evident across many parts of the Council, such as Planning.

The Deputy Leader spoke of the work of the Climate Change Steering Group and advised that meetings were scheduled to take place on a monthly basis to keep up the positive momentum.

The Leader spoke of the need to follow up funding in respect of tree planting and the ongoing work with Natural Resources Wales.

The Cabinet **RESOLVED:**

1. To note the content of the report considered by the Climate Change Cabinet Steering Group on the 18th November 2019 (attached as Appendix 1 of the report) and;
2. The recommendation of the Climate Change Cabinet Steering Group, which is to agree to submit the report to Welsh Government on the actions undertaken to further the 'Biodiversity Duty' by Rhondda Cynon Taf Council.

85 Employment Strategy

The Service Director, Community Services provided the Cabinet with the proposed Rhondda Cynon Taf Employment Strategy and Action Plan for 2019-2021.

The Service Director drew Members' attention to Section 6 of the report, where the Employment and Skills Strategy, which had been agreed by the Strategic Employment Group, was outlined. The report indicated that in 2018/19, 6500 people who were economically inactive identified that they wanted a job.

It was explained that increasing employability is essential to improving prosperity and reducing inequality. The Service Director stated that people are less likely to live in poverty if they are in employment and if they can sustain and progress in employment and that short-term unemployment can have a significant long-term impact on an individual's financial security and wellbeing.

The Service Director referred Members to the Action Plan, which detailed the actions that the Council will implement to contribute to achieve the strategy.

Members were informed that both the Strategy and Action Plan had been considered by the Finance and Performance Scrutiny Committee in November 2019 and that the Members were supportive of the recommendation to approve their implementation.

The Cabinet Member for Stronger Communities, Well-being and Cultural Services thanked the officer for the comprehensive report. The Cabinet Member commented on the value of the Employment Strategy, alongside the Tackling Poverty Strategy, which are key for the residents of RCT.

It was **RESOLVED:**

1. To approve the Employment Strategy and Action Plan 2019/21.

86 Maximising Community Benefits Trial

The Service Director, Community Services provided the Cabinet with the report, which outlined the work that had been undertaken on maximising Community

Benefits.

The Service Director spoke of a robust piece of work undertaken by one of the Council's Graduate Officers to explore options for maximising Community Benefits derived from procurement contracts. Following, the piece of work, it was agreed to trial the proposed recommendation, in order to test the willingness of tenderers to commit to making a financial contribution to a Legacy Investment Fund and/or to commit to another form of contribution as part of their Community Benefits response.

The Service Director referred Members to Section 5 of the report, where the results of the Community Benefits pilot was detailed. The officer was pleased to advise Members that although the documentation made it clear that commitment to a Community Benefits contribution was voluntary, the tenderers were willing to contribute.

The Cabinet Member for Stronger Communities, Well-being and Cultural Services thanked the Graduate Officer for the valuable and innovative piece of work. The Cabinet Member also took the opportunity to thank the contractors for their valuable contributions, which would be used for wider community benefits.

The Cabinet **RESOLVED:**

1. To approve the inclusion of Community Benefits Clauses in all relevant corporate contracts. This could either be in the form of direct work to be delivered within the community and/or a financial contribution to a 'legacy fund';
2. To approve the establishment of a 'Legacy Investment Fund' that will receive the financial contributions generated through Community Benefits to support wider Community Development activities across the County Borough, in line with this Council's corporate priorities; and
3. To commit the resource necessary to continue developments, co-ordinate and mainstream the approach.

87

Review of Learning Support Class Provision for pupils with Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties (SEBD) and significant Additional Learning Needs

The Director, Education and Inclusion Services provided the Cabinet with proposals for the creation of additional mainstream Learning Support Class (LSC) provision for pupils with Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties (SEBD) and Welsh medium LSC provision to support pupils with significant additional learning needs within Rhondda Cynon Taf.

Members learned that it is a requirement of Section 315 of the Education Act 1996 for Local Authorities to regularly review arrangements for supporting pupils with SEN and to ensure that provision is sufficient and meets the needs of its communities.

The Director advised that the proposed additional LSCs will ensure that the Council has an enhanced focus on providing more effective mainstream inclusion opportunities for pupils with SEBD and for Welsh medium pupils with significant Additional Learning Needs.

The Cabinet Member for Education and Inclusion Services thanked the Director for the comprehensive report and spoke of the importance of improving

outcomes and providing more effective opportunities for all children and young people, whilst also tying in with the Welsh Government's ALN Transformation Agenda.

(Note: County Borough Councillor M. Webber was not present for the vote)

The Cabinet **RESOLVED:**

1. To consider the information contained within the report;
2. To note the proposals for the creation of three SEBD LSC provisions and one Welsh medium LSC provision to support pupils with significant additional learning needs within the context of the School Organisation Code (2018) and the 21st Century School Modernisation Programme; and
3. To formally approve to commence consultation on the following proposals:
 - To create a new Key Stage 3/4 LSC provision for pupils with SEBD at Bryncelynnog Comprehensive School;
 - To create a new Key Stage 3/4 LSC provision for pupils with SEBD at Ferndale Community School;
 - To create a new Key Stage 3/4 LSC provision for pupils with SEBD at Mountain Ash Comprehensive School;
 - To create a new Key Stage 3/4 LSC provision for pupils with significant Additional Learning Needs (ALN) at Ysgol Garth Olwg.

88 Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG) for Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council

The Director, Prosperity and Development presented the report, which set out proposals for Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council (RCT) to act as the Lead Body for the administration and monitoring of the mandatory Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG) for Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council (MTCBC).

The Director referred Members to Section 5 of the report, which set out the proposal. It was explained that MTCBC's Chief Executive had written to RCT's Chief Executive to explore if there is any potential capacity to enter a collaborative arrangement for RCT to deliver Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG's) across Cwm Taf. Following a review, the Director felt that the collaborative arrangement would have little impact on RCT, with any potential fee income offsetting any additional costs the Council may incur in administering and monitoring MTCBC's scheme. The Director added that the proposals would also ensure that MTCBC meet its mandatory duty to consider DFG's, therefore enabling disabled residents to have the opportunity to receive a grant in order to make adaptations to their homes allowing them to live independently.

The Cabinet Member for Enterprise, Development and Housing commented that the proposal was straightforward and was happy to support the recommendation.

(Note: County Borough Councillor M. Webber chose not to vote on this item as she was not present for the discussion)

It was **RESOLVED:**

1. To approve the proposal for Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council (RCT) to act as the Lead Body for the administration and monitoring of the mandatory Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG) for Merthyr

Tydfil County Borough Council (MTCBC) as set out in section 5 of the report.

89 To consider Passing the Following Resolution:

It was **RESOLVED:** "That the press and public be excluded from the meeting under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act (as amended) for the following items of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of the exempt information as defined in paragraph 14 of Part 4 of the Schedule 12A of the Act".

90 Council investment into the redevelopment of the YMCA Pontypridd

The Director, Prosperity and Development provided the Cabinet with the report containing exempt information, which sought a decision on whether the Council should invest and take ownership of the YMCA building.

Following discussion, the Cabinet **RESOLVED:**

1. To invest £383K into the redevelopment of Pontypridd YMCA in order to secure £4M of external funding, and to ensure that the scheme is delivered according to the agreed design, programme and cost plan. This investment can be funded from existing investment priority funding already allocated for Regeneration Investment within the current capital programme.
2. To authorise the Director of Corporate Estates to take ownership of the building for £1, subject to a robust due diligence process. This would then include leasing back the building to the YMCA over a period of 99 years with a review of the arrangements at 25 years through a Lease Agreement supported by a Grant Agreement and Management Agreement.

This meeting closed at 11.55 am

**Cllr A Morgan
Chairman.**

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RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET

23rd JANUARY 2020

RECYCLING WITHIN RCT – RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE CLIMATE CHANGE CABINET STEERING GROUP

REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES AND COMMUNICATION IN CONSULTATION WITH COUNCILLOR ANN CRIMMINGS, CABINET MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENT, LEISURE

Author: Hannah Williams – Council Business Unit (01443 424062)

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide the Cabinet with the recommendations of the Climate Change Cabinet Steering Group, which considered a report on the recycling performance for the first 6 months of 2019/20, the new Materials Recovery Facility, future developments at Bryn Pica and potential legislative changes.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Cabinet:

- 2.1 Note the content of the report considered by the Climate Change Cabinet Steering Group on the 18th December 2019 (attached as Appendix 1) and;
- 2.2 Agree the recommendations of the Climate Change Cabinet Steering Group, which is to change the recycling target to 80% by 2024/25.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 To acknowledge the work of the Climate Change Cabinet Steering Group and their recommendation to change the recycling target in Rhondda Cynon Taf.

4. BACKGROUND

- 4.1 Recycling saves energy, reduces greenhouse gasses and helps tackle climate change. Recycling will play a pivotal role in helping the Council achieve its target of becoming carbon neutral by 2030.
- 4.2 RCT Council incrementally year on year has improved its recycling figure and as of the first six months of the current financial year, RCT has achieved its

recycling target set by Welsh Government, with the highest figures achieved by the Council.

- 4.3 As members will be aware, the Council has statutory targets set by Welsh Government. This year the target is 64%, failure to meet these targets could result in the Council receiving a substantial fine. The fine is based on confirmed performance, meaning every ton missed in relation to this target, could result in a minimum fine of £200 per ton.
- 4.4 In order to achieve these targets, the Council continually seeks to develop new systems to meet these targets including the development of a new Materials Recycling Facilities, to support the circular economy whilst ensuring this Council is well placed to meet current and future legislative requirements.

5. THE CLIMATE CHANGE CABINET STEERING GROUP

- 5.1 The Climate Change Cabinet Steering Group met on the 18th December 2019, where they considered the report of the Group Director, Prosperity, Development and Frontline Services.
- 5.2 Outlined within the report was RCT's positive performance during the first 6 months of the financial year, which evidenced that the Council was in a position to achieve its recycling target set by Welsh Government. Members were pleased to note that the figures are the highest ever achieved by the Council.
- 5.3 The Group Director advised that the next target for the Council would be the 2024/2025 target of 70% and recommended that it is changed to 80%, along with a suitable marketing campaign informing resident enforcement action will be taken if they do not recycle.
- 5.4 The Steering Group acknowledged the Council's simple and effective method of recycling by using a singular clear bag, in comparison to other Local Authorities.
- 5.5 The Group Director informed the Steering Group of the initiatives RCT had in place to improve recycling such as the interactive education centre in Bryn Pica, the Anaerobic Digestion Facility, the Mattress Recycling Facility and the Leachate Treatment Plant. Members were informed that the ambition was to develop an Eco Park on site, which would develop a recycling process for hard plastics whereby plastics are grinded down and washed to either sell the material or turn it into a product on site.
- 5.6 Following a lengthy discussion, the Steering Group were of the view that RCT Council is at the forefront of continuous improvement in the area and was therefore, in a positive position to change the recycling target to 80% by 2024/25.

6. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED

6.1 There are no Legal Implications aligned to this report.

7. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

7.1 There are no equality or diversity implications as a result of the recommendations set out in the report.

8. CONSULTATION / INVOLVEMENT

8.1 There are no Consultation implications aligned to this report.

9. FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)

9.1 There are no financial implications associated with this report.

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

10.1 The recycling processes and future plans align to the Corporate Plan and Corporate Priorities.

10.2 It is also linked with the Well Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act, helping to create a resilient Wales and a Wales of cohesive communities.

11. CONCLUSION

11.1 On the 18th December 2019, the Climate Change Cabinet Steering Group met to discuss the report on the recycling performance for the first 6 months of 2019/20, the new Materials Recovery Facility, future developments at Bryn Pica and potential legislative changes.

11.2 At the meeting, following a number of queries, Members resolved to recommend to Cabinet, to change the recycling target to 80% by 2024/25.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

AS AMENDED BY

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET

23rd JANUARY 2020

**CLIMATE CHANGE CABINET STEERING GROUP RECOMMENDATIONS –
RECYCLING WITHIN RCT**

**REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES AND
COMMUNICATION IN CONSULTATION WITH COUNCILLOR ANN CRIMMINGS,
CABINET MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENT, LEISURE**



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CLIMATE CHANGE CABINET STEERING GROUP

18th DECEMBER 2019

RECYCLING WITHIN RHONDDA CYNON TAF

REPORT OF THE GROUP DIRECTOR OF PROSPERITY, DEVELOPMENT AND FRONTLINE SERVICES IN DISCUSSION WITH THE CABINET'S CLIMATE CHANGE CHAMPION (COUNCILLOR RHYS LEWIS)

Author: Nigel Wheeler - (01443 827707)

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to update Members of the Climate Change Committee on the recycling performance for the first 6 months of 2019/20, the new Materials Recovery Facility, future developments at Bryn Pica and potential legislative changes.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Members:

- 2.1 Note the content of the report:
- 2.2 Recommend to Cabinet to change the recycling target to 80% by 2024/25

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 This Council as do all councils in Wales has statutory targets set by Welsh Government. This year the target is 64%, failure to meet these targets will result in the Council receiving a substantial fine. The fine is based on performance so every ton we miss the target by, will result in a minimum fine of £200 per ton.
- 3.2 In order to achieve these targets, councils have to develop working systems to deliver these targets through new Materials Recycling Facilities, and true circular economy whilst ensuring they are able to change when there are legislative changes.

4. UPDATE / CURRENT POSITION

- 4.1 RCT Council incrementally year on year has improved its recycling figure, but last year saw a slight drop in the performance, this was mainly due to the change in way we were able to measure the wood we collected at our Community Recycling Centres and the tonnage in green waste collected at the kerbside due to the weather.
- 4.2 These changes affected all Councils and not only our Council, whilst other Councils also indicated that they had seen recycling plateau, something we had been concerned about for some time.
- 4.3 2019/2020 is a target year in regard to the legislation, and the target is that we must achieve a recycling figure of at least 64%, failure to do so would result in the Council receiving a fine. The fine is a minimum of £200 on every ton we fail to miss the target by, so it could be a substantial amount.
- 4.4 The table below shows our performance during the first 6 months of this financial year. These figures are subject to ratification by Waste data flow and any change will be minimal.

4.5

	Q1	Q2	Total For
	2019/20	2019/20	2019/20
Dry Reuse	379.35	461.61	840.96
Dry Recycling	15710.31	18,161.45	33,871.76
Composting	5,479.19	5,950.82	11,430.01
Total municipal waste	32,105.14	34,841.50	66,946.64
WMT 10(iv) - Dry reuse rate	1.18%	1.32%	1.26%
WMT 10(v) - Dry recycling rate	48.93%	52.13%	50.60%
WMT 10(vi) - Composting rate	17.07%	17.08%	17.07%
WMT 09b reuse, recycling and composting rate	67.18%	70.53%	68.92%

- 4.6 For the record the performance highlighted in the table, shows that we have achieved the target set out by Welsh Government and puts in a good position to be able to maintain this for the remainder of the year, thus avoiding any fines.
- 4.7 It should also be noted that these figures are the highest ever achieved by this Council.
- 4.8 The next target for this Council is the 2024/2025 target of 70% so if we can maintain this performance and improve slightly we are well on course to achieve this considerably earlier than we need to. It is hoped that provision of the new MRF at Bryn Pica will go a long way in taking us over the target and towards 80%. Therefore I feel it would be appropriate to recommend to Cabinet to change the target for 2024/25 to 80% and putting together a marketing campaign informing resident enforcement action will be taken if they do not recycle.

- 4.9 The council has recently invested in a new Materials Recycling Facility at Bryn Pica, it is too early to say the impact this will have on our recycling percentage but based on the early commissioning there will be an increase in the percentage.
- 4.10 It has also been very noticeable that the purity of the material coming out of the MRF is extremely good and in particular the steel and aluminium is of a really high purity and some buyers who have been to see the material stated that it is the cleanest material they have ever seen.
- 4.11 Despite this investment, the MRF is only as good as the residents who recycle and if the material is contaminated there is not a lot we can do, also to achieve 70/80% we need buy-in from all our residents, we still undertake awareness but this is labour intensive, we also use enforcement.
- 4.12 Our recycling collection method is simple, so there is no excuse not to recycle but still we have residents who do not recycle.
- 4.13 The site at Bryn Pica is home to a number of activities:-
- Material Recycling Facility (MRF)
 - Anaerobic Digestion Facility (AD)
 - Mattress Recycling Facility
 - Leachate Treatment Plant
 - Landfill
 - Landfill Gas
 - Education Centre
- 4.14 The challenge in waste is to provide a true circular economy whilst utilising the energy produced.
- 4.15 At Bryn Pica we have land, we have green energy produced through the AD Plant and from the methane produced in the landfill, it is our ambition to develop an Eco Park on site, utilising the energy produced and providing units where businesses can set up and make a product from the materials we collect, basically materials collected in Wales, recycled in Wales utilising green energy, a true circular economy
- 4.16 At present our business case for the Park is under consideration with WG for funding, whilst we have a number of businesses interested in locating to the site, in addition to the private companies, Amgen is looking to develop a recycling process for hard plastics whereby we grind down and wash the plastics and then either sell the material or turn it into a product on site.
- 4.17 The concept of the project has already won a WG award for innovation and the council has already invested its own monies into the project and we are extremely hopeful further WG funding will follow.

- 4.18 Added to this, there is currently a consultation exercise out from WG on Trade Waste Collections with a Waste Strategy Consultation due to come out early in the new year, both could have significant implications on what we as a council do, but I feel we are in a good position to change our service with whatever comes out of the consultation.

5. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 There are no Equality or Diversity implications aligned to this report.

6. CONSULTATION

- 6.1 There are no Consultation implications aligned to this report.

7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)

- 7.1 There are Financial implications in failing to achieve the statutory targets.

8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED

- 8.1 There are no Legal Implications aligned to this report.

9. LINKS TO THE COUNCIL'S CORPORATE PLAN / OTHER CORPORATE PRIORITIES/SIP

- 9.1 The recycling processes and future plans we adopt align itself to the Corporate Plan and Corporate Priorities.
- 9.2 This clearly is linked with the Well Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act, helping to create a resilient Wales and a Wales of cohesive communities.

10. CONCLUSION

- 10.1 RCT Council are proud of its recycling services and prides itself being at the forefront of continuous improvement in this area.
- 10.2 This is highlighted with the Eco Park plans and the development of the new Material Recycling Facility currently being commissioned.

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET

23RD JANUARY 2020

TAFFS WELL THERMAL SPRING – GENERATING CARBON FREE ENERGY FOR THE COMMUNITY OF TAFFS WELL - RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE CLIMATE CHANGE CABINET STEERING GROUP

REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES AND COMMUNICATION IN CONSULTATION WITH COUNCILLOR MARK NORRIS, CABINET MEMBER FOR CORPORATE ESTATES

Author: Hannah Williams – Council Business Unit (01443 424062)

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide the Cabinet with the recommendations of the Climate Change Cabinet Steering Group, which considered a report on the current situation with regards to the Taffs Well Spring Renewable Energy Project.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Cabinet:

- 2.1 Note the content of the report considered by the Climate Change Cabinet Steering Group on the 18th December 2019 (attached as Appendix 1) and;
- 2.2 Agree the recommendation of the Climate Change Cabinet Steering Group, which is to approve the next steps of the project.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 To acknowledge the work of the Climate Change Cabinet Steering Group and their recommendation to approve the next steps of the project.

4. BACKGROUND

- 4.1 In accordance with the content of the internal recommendation paper and the evaluation of the technical options it was agreed to proceed on the basis of providing a heat network to replace the existing heating system at two adjacent RCT Council buildings. For the Taffs Well Park Pavilion (which is currently used as a crèche facility but could have other project-related use in future) the intention is to replace the existing electric heating. For Fynnon Taf Primary

School (now including the new school block that is planned) the plan is to replace or integrate with the existing gas fired system.

- 4.4 In accordance with the content of an internal recommendation paper and the evaluation of the financial options, the intended plan is that the project will be funded by RCT Council as part of its wider commitments including carbon reduction. The current expected core project is expected to save 37.1 tonnes of CO₂.
- 4.5 There is also future potential for developing a second phase of the project by expanding the use of the Spring water into a small but wider District heating network.

5. THE CLIMATE CHANGE CABINET STEERING GROUP

- 5.1 The Climate Change Cabinet Steering Group met on the 18th December 2019 to consider the report on the current situation with regards to the Taffs Well Spring Renewable Energy Project.
- 5.2 At the meeting, the Steering Group were provided with a detailed PowerPoint presentation, which sought to explain the background to the project, the proposed way forward and the cost implications.
- 5.3 The Steering Group were pleased to learn that the current expected core project was expected to save 37.1 tonnes of CO₂ and agreed to recommend to Cabinet the approval of the project.

6. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED

- 6.1 There are no Legal Implications aligned to this report.

7. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 There are no equality or diversity implications as a result of the recommendations set out in the report.

8. CONSULTATION / INVOLVEMENT

- 8.1 There are no consultation requirements at present with regards to this supporting report. However, should the project proceed to the next phases of development, appropriate consultations will take place as part of the planning approval process.

9. FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)

- 9.1 The existing early feasibility work is funded through existing approved budgets.
- 9.2 There a number of cost variables that will affect the final cost but overall the cost is unlikely to exceed the expected range of £250k to £300k. However by

structuring the financial elements to maximise the Renewable Heat Allowance payment the pay-back on investment could be reduced by several years

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

10.1 This report has full regard to the seven national wellbeing goals.

11. CONCLUSION

11.1 On the 18th December 2019, the Climate Change Cabinet Steering Group met to discuss the report on the current situation with regards to the Taffs Well Spring Renewable Energy Project.

11.2 At the meeting, following a number of queries, Members resolved to recommend to Cabinet to approve the next steps of the project.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

AS AMENDED BY

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET

23RD JANUARY 2020

**CLIMATE CHANGE CABINET STEERING GROUP RECOMMENDATIONS –
RECYCLING WITHIN RCT**

**REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES AND
COMMUNICATION IN CONSULTATION WITH COUNCILLOR ANN CRIMMINGS,
CABINET MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENT, LEISURE**



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CLIMATE CHANGE CABINET STEERING GROUP

18TH DECEMBER 2019

**TAFFS WELL THERMAL SPRING – GENERATING CARBON FREE ENERGY
FOR THE COMMUNITY OF TAFFS WELL**

**REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE ESTATES IN DISCUSSION WITH
THE CABINET MEMBER FOR CORPORATE SERVICES**

Author(s): David Powell, Director of Corporate Estates and Steve Lock, Head of Energy Project Management.

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide supporting information for the Discussion Paper – Work Programme for the Climate Change Cabinet Steering Group meeting. The report outlines the current situation with regards to the Taffs Well Spring Renewable Energy Project.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Steering Group:

- 2.1 To note the contents of this report as part of the ongoing work of the Climate Change Cabinet Steering Group and recommend a way forward for Cabinet.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 The contents of this report provides supporting information for the Discussion Paper – Work Programme for the Climate Change Cabinet Steering Group meeting presented at the first group meeting and provides an update on the specific area of the Taffs Well Thermal Spring Renewable Energy Project.

4. PROJECT BACKGROUND

- 4.1 The Taffs Well Thermal Spring emerges on the eastern bank of the River Taff in Taffs Well in the south east part of the borough of Rhondda Cynon Taf and is the only natural thermal spring in Wales. The current outlet for the thermal spring water is contained inside a brick-lined well within a Grade II Listed building constructed in the 1800s. The water runs constantly at 21°C and currently discharges through overflow pipes directly into the River Taff.

In terms of technical potential, the Taffs Well spring does not provide a great thermal reservoir at the surface, only being 10oC above normal ground water temperatures, therefore it cannot provide direct heating and a solution using a water source heat pump application is the only viable option.

- 4.2. In recent years there have been two previous feasibility studies led by the Friends of Taffs Well into developing the renewable energy potential of the Taffs Wells Spring in various ways. Then in 2017 the Council's Corporate Estates 'Energy' team assumed responsibility for the project and further work was carried out, including analysis of the technical and practical options for beneficially using the spring water and the viability of the different financial funding options.
- 4.3 This work was then summarised in an internal recommendation paper covering the various issues and options and approval to proceed on the technical and financial basis outlined below was subsequently agreed in early 2019.
- 4.3 In accordance with the content of the internal recommendation paper and the evaluation of the technical options it was agreed to proceed on the basis of providing a heat network to replace the existing heating system at two adjacent RCT Council buildings. For the Taffs Well Park Pavilion (which is currently used as a crèche facility but could have other project-related use in future) the intention is to replace the existing electric heating. For Fynnon Taf Primary School (now including the new school block that is planned) the plan is to replace or integrate with the existing gas fired system.
- 4.4 In accordance with the content of the internal recommendation paper and the evaluation of the financial options the intended plan is that the project will be funded by RCT Council as part of its wider commitments including carbon reduction. The current expected core project is expected to save 37.1 tonnes of CO2.
- 4.5 There is also future potential for developing a second phase of the project by expanding the use of the Spring water into a small but wider District heating network.

5. CURRENT PROJECT SITUATION

- 5.1 Following the approval to proceed to next stage of the project a formal tender process was carried out to appoint an external specialist consultancy to update certain information, and provide final feasibility, planning and procurement advice based on a water source heat pump system. As a result of this process Nuvision Energy Wales (Ltd.) of Cardiff were appointed and commenced work on the project in September. The first report from Nuvision on the feasibility of the project has very recently been received and whilst the details are still being considered there are some key points;
 - That there are no engineering reasons why the heat within the Taff Well Thermal Spring water cannot be used for a renewable energy project incorporating ground source heat pumps to supply both the Park Pavilion and Ffynnon Taf Primary School.

- That there is more than sufficient heat within the Taffs Well Spring Water to meet the demands of the current project for the Park Pavilion and Ffynnon Taf Primary School.

6. PROJECT FORWARD PLAN AND TIMESCALES

- 6.1 A number of immediate next steps have been identified from the recent Nuvision interim report including some clarification issues with Western Power and Natural Resources Wales.
- 6.2 Following clarification of these immediate next steps a timescale for the necessary Planning application will be finalised in early 2020. In conjunction with this timescale a final technical specification for the Procurement of the construction phase of the project will also be finalised prior to the formal Procurement process which is envisaged to take place in Spring/Summer 2020. The necessary construction and related other works will then take place with an overall plan for the project to be fully completed by March 2021.

7. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 An Equality Impact Assessment is not required with regard to this report.

8. CONSULTATION

- 8.1 There are no consultation requirements at present with regards to this supporting report. However, should the project proceed to the next phases of development, appropriate consultations will take place as part of the planning approval process.

9. FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)

- 9.1 The existing early feasibility work is funded through existing approved budgets.
- 9.2 There a number of cost variables that will affect the final cost but overall the cost is unlikely to exceed the expected range of £250k to £300k. However by structuring the financial elements to maximise the Renewable Heat Allowance payment the pay-back on investment could be reduced by several years.

10. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 There are no legal implications aligned to this report.

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

- 11.1 This report provides information in the area of the Taffs Well Spring Renewable Energy Project future actions as part of the ongoing work of the Climate Change Cabinet Steering Group which will take full regard to the seven national wellbeing goals.

12. CONCLUSION

- 12.1 This report provides information in the area of Taffs Well Thermal Spring Renewable Energy Project future actions as part of the ongoing work of the Climate Change Cabinet Steering Group.

Contact Officers; David Powell 01443 424144, Steve Lock 01443 281191

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET

23RD JANUARY 2020

NATIONAL ADOPTION SERVICE WALES ANNUAL REPORT 2018-2019

REPORT OF THE GROUP DIRECTOR, COMMUNITY AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES IN DISCUSSION WITH THE RELEVANT PORTFOLIO HOLDER, COUNCILLOR CHRISTINA LEYSHON

**AUTHOR: Ann Batley, Service Director Children's Services
Tel. No: 01443 744044**

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to share with the Cabinet the National Adoption Service Wales Annual Report 2018-2019

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Cabinet:

- 2.1 Note the contents of the report.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 The report attached at Appendix 1 is the National Adoption Service for Wales Annual Report, that as part of Regulation 22 of the Local Authority Adoption Service (Wales) Regulations 2007 and Section 15(c) of the Adoption and Children Act 2002 (Joint Adoption Regulations)(Wales) Directions 2015, is required to be brought before Cabinet.

4. BACKGROUND

- 4.1 The National Adoption Service for Wales (NAS) was launched in November 2014 bringing all local authorities in Wales together into a unique collaboration for the delivery of adoption services. The legal basis underpinning the service is the Social Services and Well-being Act (Wales) which gave Welsh Ministers the power to direct how local authorities in Wales deliver their adoption functions. This was enforced through a set of regulations, The Adoption and Children Act 2002 (Joint Adoption Arrangements) (Wales) Directions 2015 [generally referred

to as the 'Directions Powers'], which require local authorities to collaborate on a set foot print to create Regional Adoption Collaborative.

- 4.2 The National Service establishes governance arrangements that provide national direction and co-ordination. Its broad aim is to improve and make consistent the arrangements for timely placements of children, training and assessment of adopters, adoption support and collaborative working.

- 4.3 The attached Annual Plan sets out the work undertaken by the National Adoption Service Wales in 2018-2019

5. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 This is an information report and, therefore, no Equality and Diversity screening is required.

6. CONSULTATION

- 6.1 Consultation was undertaken by the National Adoption Service Wales in the preparation of the Annual Plan with children, young people, families, a variety of partner agencies and staff from the Regional Services.

7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)

- 7.1 There are no adverse financial implications associated with this report.

8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED

- 8.1 The Social Services and Wellbeing Act (2014) required very significant changes to the way social services are planned, designed, commissioned and delivered. The primary duties of this Act that impact on the future commissioning arrangements for children looked after include:

- promoting the upbringing of children within their family whenever it is safe to do so;
- consideration of the most appropriate placement where it has not been possible to place a looked after child either with a parent or connected person which will include: foster care; adoption; residential provision; alternative arrangements (for example, supporting young people aged 16 or over to live independently in rented accommodation or in supported lodgings).

9. LINKS TO THE COUNCIL'S CORPORATE PLAN/OTHER CORPORATE PRIORITIES/WELL-BEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS ACT

- 9.1 The provision of effective responses to the needs of children and young people is a key priority for the Council and is supported by the contents of this Annual Plan.

10. CONCLUSION

- 10.1 Overall there was a slight increase in the number of children placed for adoption.
- 10.2 The recruitment of adoptive parents remained at a similar level to last year. Therefore, recruiting sufficient adopters in Wales continues to be an ongoing challenge.
- 10.3 The Welsh Government investment package of £2.3 million for 2019/2020 will support the identified priorities to be taken forward and implemented which should result in improved performance.

Other Information:-

Relevant Scrutiny Committee: Children and Young People

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972
AS AMENDED BY
THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985
RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET

23RD JANUARY 2020

NATIONAL ADOPTION SERVICE WALES ANNUAL REPORT 2018-2019

**REPORT OF THE GROUP DIRECTOR, COMMUNITY AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES
IN DISCUSSION WITH THE RELEVANT PORTFOLIO HOLDER, COUNCILLOR
CHRISTINA LEYSHON**

Background Papers

None

**Officer to contact: Ann Batley, Service Director Children Services.
Tel. No: 01443 744044**



Gwasanaeth
Mabwysiadu
Cenedlaethol

National
Adoption
Service

**Achieving More Together /
Cyflawni Mwy Gyda'n Gilydd**

ANNUAL REPORT 2018-19





FOREWORD

Since being established in 2014 The National Adoption Service has focused on clear priorities to deliver an improved adoption service in Wales. This Annual Report (2018/19) reflects on achievements whilst identifying future priorities to deliver ongoing improvement of the service to children and adopters.

Actively listening to adopters and children has influenced how the National Adoption Service has evolved and developed to deliver change and good services. There is evidence that the benefits of improvement are being felt by many adopters and their children although we acknowledge there is more to do.

Continued improvement remains a priority for the service delivered through the Central Team, Regional Local Government Adoption Services and Voluntary Sector Agencies. This collaborative approach has brought a shared vision, priorities, strategies and delivery of services that is making a positive difference.

We are very pleased to take this opportunity to thank adopters, staff in all agencies within the National Adoption Service Collaborative for their hard work and dedication.

We are also delighted that the Welsh Government has made available a £2.3m investment package from 2019/20 which will enable us to move forward on agreed improvement priorities for the immediate future.

Much progress has been made since the Service's inception, but the needs of children in Wales continue to demand a faster and smarter response to the scale and complexity of the challenge. NAS is ambitious for the role we can play in responding to that challenge.



Philip T. Hodgson

Phil Hodgson

Independent Chair of the Advisory Group



Geraint Hopkins

Cllr Geraint Hopkins

Chair of Governance Board



Suzanne Griffiths

Suzanne Griffiths

Director

INTRODUCTION

The National Adoption Service for Wales is a collaboration for the provision of adoption services across Wales.

Since November 2014, it has brought together all local authority adoption services into five regional collaboratives, with co-ordination and leadership provided by a small central team and Director. Voluntary adoption agencies operating in Wales are key partners in the collaborative, as are other agencies such as health and education.

CENTRAL TEAM



National Adoption Service – Central Team

c/o City of Cardiff Council,
Room 409 County Hall, Atlantic Wharf,
Cardiff, CF10 4UW
029 2087 3927
contact@adoptcymru.com
www.adoptcymru.com

NORTH WALES

Isle of Anglesey, Gwynedd, Conwy,
Denbighshire, Flintshire, Wrexham



North Wales Adoption Service

3rd Floor, Lambpit Street,
Wrexham, LL11 1AR
01978 295311
adoption@wrexham.gov.uk
www.northwalesadoption.gov.uk

MID & WEST WALES

Ceredigion, Powys, Carmarthenshire,
Pembrokeshire



Mid & West Wales Adoption

Building 1, St David's Park, Johnstown,
Carmarthenshire, SA31 3HB
01267 246970
adoptionenquires@carmarthenshire.gov.uk
www.adoptionmwwales.org.uk

Neuadd Brycheiniog, Cambrian Way,
Brecon, Powys, LD3 7HR
01597 827666
adoptionenquiries@carmarthenshire.gov.uk
www.adoptionmwwales.org.uk

WESTERN BAY

Swansea, Neath Port Talbot,
Bridgend



Western Bay Adoption Service

Port Talbot Civic Centre,
Port Talbot CF131PJ
0300 365 2222
enquires@westernbayadoption.org
www.westernbayadoption.org

VALE, VALLEYS & CARDIFF

Merthyr Tydfil, Rhondda Cynon Taf,
Cardiff, Vale of Glamorgan



Vale, Valleys & Cardiff Adoption

Level 7, Ty Pennant, Catherine Street,
Pontypridd, CF37 2TB
0800 0234 064
adoption@valeofglamorgan.gov.uk
www.adopt4vvc.org

SOUTH EAST WALES

Monmouthshire, Blaenau Gwent,
Torfaen, Caerphilly, Newport



South East Wales Adoption Service

North Wing, 2nd Floor Block B,
Mamhilad House, Mamhilad Parke Estate,
Pontypool, Torfaen, NP40HZ
01495 355766
adoption@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk
www.blaenau-gwent.gov.uk/3122.asp

ALL WALES VOLUNTARY ADOPTION AGENCIES SERVICES

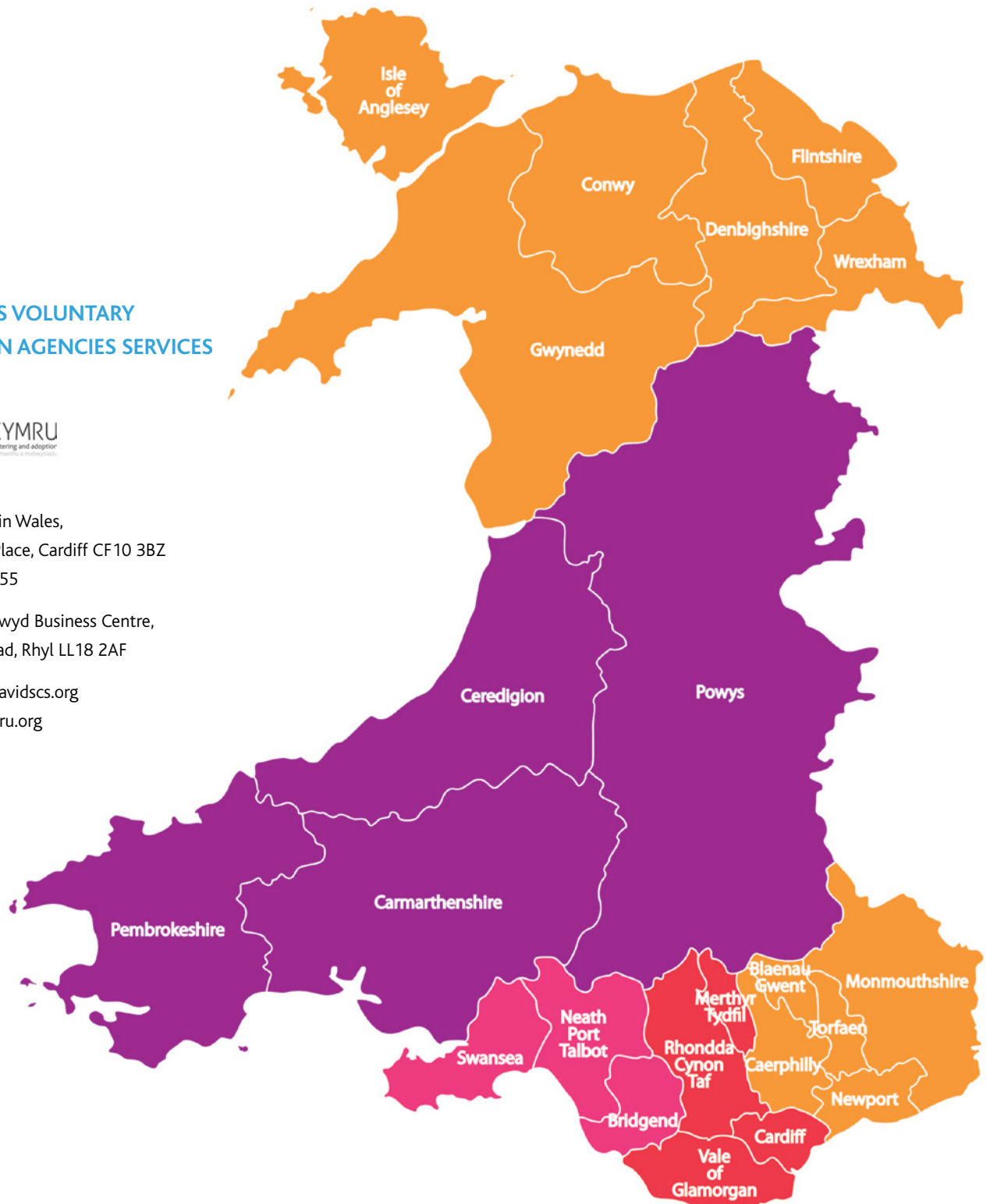


AFA Cymru

c/o Children in Wales,
25 Windsor Place, Cardiff CF10 3BZ
029 2076 1155

W2 Morfa Clwyd Business Centre,
84 Marsh Road, Rhyl LL18 2AF

Info-afa@stdavidscs.org
www.afacymru.org



Adoption UK

Penhaved Studios, Penhaved Street,
Grangetown, Cardiff, CF117LU
029 2023 0319
www.adoptionuk.org



Barnardo's Cymru

Trident Court, East Moors Road,
Cardiff, CF245TD
0800 0546 788
cymruadoptionandfostering@
barnardos.org.uk
www.barnardos.org.uk/adoption



St David's Children Society

28 Park Place, Cardiff, CF10 3BA
029 2066 7007
info@stdavidscs.org
www.adoptionwales.org

FIVE YEARS ON

Celebrating our achievements and embracing the challenges



The National Adoption Service (NAS) has been working for five years to support better outcomes for children for whom adoption is the best plan.

It was established in 2014 in response to a National Assembly Enquiry through a subsequent Ministerial Advisory Group. Its role is to work in a unique collaborative way, improving and coordinating the delivery of adoption services across Wales and in particular:

- Raising the profile of adoption;
- Improving timescales for children and adopters;
- Improving adoption support including changing the 'postcode lottery' for services; and
- Providing leadership to promote more consistent services and standards.

The role adoption plays in society continues to change; legislation continues to change to reflect this. What has not changed is that children who cannot remain with their birth family need permanent substitute families, to belong, to be nurtured and be loved. Adoption services provide these children with families as well as services and support to adoptive parents, birth parents and others affected by adoption.

This year marks the fifth year of the National Adoption Service and the thirtieth anniversary of the UK's ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). The National Adoption Service seeks to secure positive changes for children where adoption is in their best interests so that they might realise their rights under the convention.

SOME OF OUR ACHIEVEMENTS FROM THE LAST FIVE YEARS

- Successfully raised the profile of adoption with the public, funders and policy makers.
- Accessed additional funding; a £90k development grant from the Welsh Government each year, £125k targeted investment in 2017/18 and a £2.3m investment for adoption support to commence in 2019/20.
- Improved performance in the key areas of approving adopters and placing children more quickly, alongside embedding a performance culture supported through regular evaluation and reporting.
- Increased the availability of life journey materials through a new best practice approach.
- Developed how we listen to adopters and their children and ensured their messages and input make a difference to the service.
- Created five regional adoption collaboratives as the focus for local government adoption expertise and access point for services.
- Developed and maintained a strong partnership with the Welsh Voluntary Adoption Agencies. This added value, different expertise, additional services and more choice, resulting in exciting new services such as Adopting Together Service, TESSA and a new Children and Young People's service.
- Commissioned and developed the all Wales website, which now provides a comprehensive source of information for parents and agencies.
- Brought the Wales Adoption Register into the service, giving greater breadth and depth of choice for prospective parents and children.
- Produced strategic plans, which not only outline what improvements are needed but help influence and improve legislation and policy, as well as achieve investment in times of constraint.

THE CHALLENGES WE ARE NOW ADDRESSING ARE:

- Maintaining performance improvements and making them more consistent within services and across Wales.
- Improving service agility and access to resources to respond to emerging issues and changing service demands.
- Using our data and information to better effect.
- Making a complex governance and operational structure for collaboration, work effectively within local government and with partners.

THESE SUCCESSES AND CHALLENGES INFORM OUR CURRENT VISION WHICH IS TO:

- > Increase the number and range of adoptive homes available so that all children with an adoption plan are placed in a timely way.
- > Ensure prospective and approved adopters receive good quality, timely assessment and support.
- > Implement the National Adoption Service Framework for Adoption Support to provide improved access to advice, information and services for those that need and want support.
- > Achieve overall improvements in the performance of adoption services across Wales.
- > Create a modern, responsive and forward-thinking adoption service for Wales.

Alongside these undoubted strides forward and improvements to services new challenges have become evident; not least of all in ensuring that there are sufficient adopters available to meet the number and needs of children for whom we are family finding.

THE SERVICE IN 2018/19



During the business year:

- more than 310 children were placed in their new adoptive home;
- approximately 280 children had their adoption orders granted¹;
- a further 338 children, with the legal authority to be placed, were waiting to be matched or placed with their new family at the end of the year;
- 212 new adoptive families were approved.

The service worked with circa 14% of the children who were looked after in Wales last year.

Welsh Government data indicates that for 2017/18 (latest available) 18% of all the children who ceased to be Looked After were adopted.

The adoption agencies that make up the National Adoption Service for Wales provide a range of services to support these children and their families, as well as for others affected by adoption.

In addition to working with the children above, adoption services across Wales also:

- provided adoption support to more than 100 of the children placed in the year
- facilitated more than 3,281 active letterbox contact arrangements
- provided a service to 268 birth parents
- received 38 requests for support from birth siblings' other relatives
- received 226 requests for access to birth records and
- received 124 requests for intermediary/tracing support.



¹ Awaiting confirmation in Welsh Government data in October 2019

OUR 2018/19 PRIORITIES

PRIORITY 1

Placing children effectively

- Keeping recruitment focused on the needs of children likely to be adopted
- Implementing the new Wales Adoption Register and adopter database

WHY WAS THIS IMPORTANT?

- We wanted to increase the range of adoptive homes available to meet the needs of all children with an adoptive plan.
- Research tells us outcomes in adoption are affected by the length of time children spend in care and their age at the time of placement. Being able to make a timely match for a child depends on having a sufficiency of adopters who are prepared to care for children who have varied and sometimes complex needs.
- Making the best possible match between children and adopters increases the likelihood of a successful outcome and improves timeliness.
- We aim to use the best information about service performance, research and best practice to develop more effective processes, and timeframes to underpin best practice.

HOW DID WE DO?

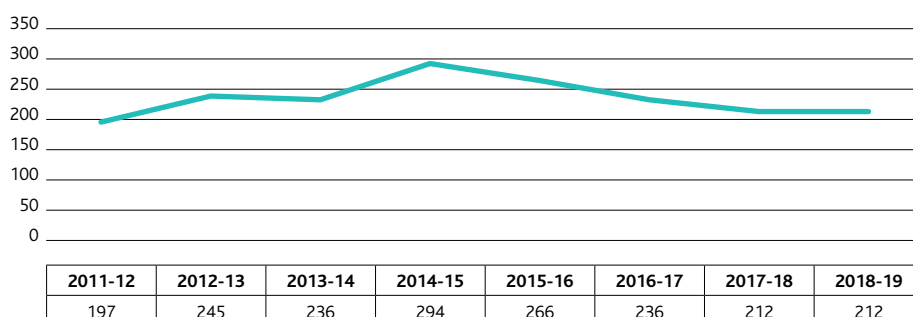
At 311, slightly more children were placed with their new families this year and approximately 280 children were already in placement and had their Adoption Orders granted.

However, recruiting sufficient adopters in Wales has become an ongoing challenge.

At the time of NAS's creation, we faced a different range of challenges, namely reducing waiting time to approve adopters and ensuring we were recruiting adopters who could be matched with children who had complex needs and were waiting longer.

Our strategies are now informed by our data, giving us a much better understanding of the need for placements, which is greater than the number of adopters we are approving. However, having an impact on recruitment takes time; recruitment in 2018/19 remained at a similar level to last year. Adopter recruitment in Wales has been falling and is now back to pre NAS levels; it is difficult to identify precisely why adopter approvals have fallen – this trend is, however, also evident in England and Scotland.

Adopters Approved



The story behind the data

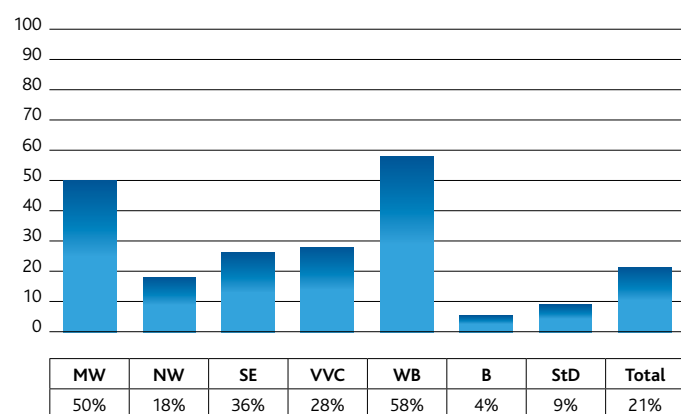
ADOPTER ENQUIRIES AND ASSESSMENTS

There has been an overall increase in enquiries from prospective adopters since NAS was formed.

However, the picture beneath this is more complex. At a regional level there is an overall upward trend in two of the bigger regions and maintenance in another, while the two voluntary adoption agencies have higher levels of enquiries.

In both the regional and voluntary adoption agencies, conversion of enquiries into assessments varies, with the regional services tending to see more applications resulting from enquiries received.

Percentage conversion from initial enquiry to assessment starting



Q4 2018-19, based on average of 3 months from Initial Enquiry to Assessment Starting

We can build on the early indications of success, in increasing the number of potential adopters coming forward at enquiry stage. Adopters have reported that:

- there is good information available through the national website and directly from the regional services;
- response times to enquiries are timely and many first contacts are considered helpful and supportive.

In order to understand this better, NAS commissioned customer feedback research to consider the reasons behind so many enquirers not proceeding beyond this stage. The overall findings are informing our work. Whilst identifying that the majority of enquirers cited personal reasons for not proceeding, key recommendations from the report also include:

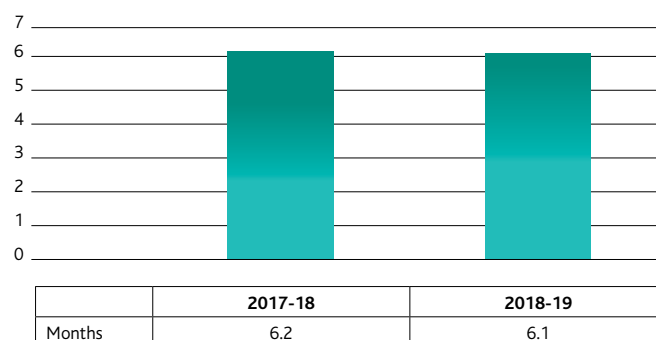
- A need for a more consistent message across agencies
- More flexibility around timeframes, where potential adopters want to delay their applications
- A more welcoming approach and clearer follow up processes for those who do want to defer applications.

This work has led to a number of changes which will be implemented in 2019/20:

- We are producing a good practice guide to support staff in dealing with enquiries and the early stage of the assessment process. This will move away from agencies trying to 'test' people at the very start of their enquiry and respond to adoption managers views that the messages that are given regarding issues such as smoking, income and medical criteria are up to date, accurate and consistent.
- We have commissioned Cowshed PR to support NAS at both national and regional levels. This will lead to better integrated marketing and recruitment activity.
- We are providing more focused efforts to increase enquiries and approvals within a revised NAS Recruitment Strategy. Using recognised marketing techniques, we aim to keep people engaged and ensure barriers families face, to progress their interest into further action, are removed.
- To meet planned changes to regulations, we are implementing a two-stage process for the assessment and approval of prospective adopters whilst reducing the timescales for making use of the Adoption Register for Wales. NAS has been working since 2015 to influence a change in the Adoption Agency (Wales) Regulations 2003 to simplify and streamline the recruitment and assessment of prospective adopters. This has borne fruit with revised regulations due to be implemented in 2019/20.

The above will enable us to further improve the timeframes for adopter approvals. The average timeframe from enquiry to approval improved to just 9.1 months this year, with administrative delays around essential checks behind many that took longer. The time between the formal application by adopters and their approval is good, an average of 6.2 months, which is within the government guideline. 56% of applicants were approved with the 6-month benchmark.

Average timeframe (months) from formal application to adopters approval



Benchmark: 6 months or less

DEMAND FOR PLACEMENTS

The numbers of placement orders being granted by Welsh courts is now showing year on year fluctuations after a peak of 467 in 2012/13; regions report that circa 340 placement orders were made in 2018/19. This is alongside a further increase in the number of children being identified by local authorities as, likely to be in need of an adoptive placement, which indicates that similar, or more placement orders are likely as we go through the coming year.

We are using these trends to project forward so that regions and agencies have a clear understanding of likely demand, allowing them to plan activity in advance in order to meet more ambitious recruitment goals.



IMPACT ON PLACEMENT ACTIVITY

The number of children waiting for a placement reduced slightly at the end of this year.

NAS had previously been successful in reducing average timeframes for children being placed, but this has changed this year.

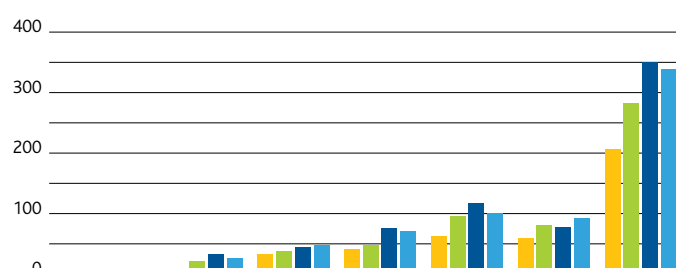
Although almost half of the children were placed within the benchmark of 6 months or less, during 2018/19, the projected annual average time has increased in 2018/19 to 9.9 months.

There are a number of factors that have impacted on this indicator:

- Some adoptive homes have been more challenging to find due to a small number of children with very complex needs;
- Late decisions or delayed applications where it is agreed that foster carers can adopt the children they are caring for;
- Prolonged court proceedings including appeals by birth parents.

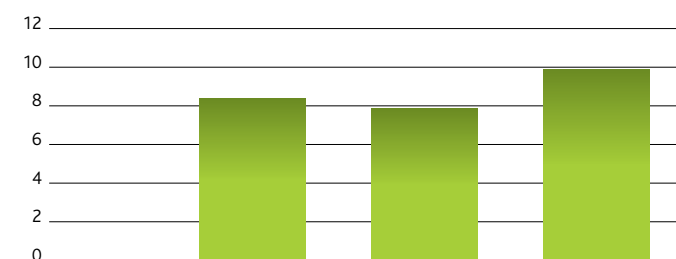
The more positive aspect of this is that regions have been increasingly successful in placing children with more complex needs, however as identified this leads to placement preparations taking longer.

Measure 7: Number of children with 'should be placed decision' and placement order who have not yet been placed



	MWW	NW	SE	VVC	WB	Total
2015/16	9	34	41	62	60	206
2016/17	22	39	47	95	80	283
2017/18	34	46	76	117	77	350
2018/19	27	48	70	101	92	338

Average timeframe (months) between placement order and placed for adoption



	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19
Months	8.4	7.9	9.9

Benchmark: 6 months or less

What else is helping us recruit adopters and place children?



ADOPTING TOGETHER SERVICE

The voluntary adoption agencies in Wales play a key role in delivering adoption services across the country, and recent innovative projects like the 'Adopting Together Service' demonstrates their commitment and capacity to work creatively and support the sector as a whole.

Adopting Together Service was launched this year in 2018/19 – a collaborative project between St David's and Barnardo's with Adoption UK in Wales and supported by the statutory sector through the National Adoption Service. It emerged, following a request from statutory services, for a creative response to a shared desire and need, to secure permanence for children who wait longest for a family.

Contracts have now been agreed in four out of the five regional services.

Although the number of children placed is unlikely to be high, it is of utmost importance that children with additional needs have the opportunity to experience living in stable and loving homes. Twelve children have been placed to date in the first year of operation, with a target of placing 25 children in 2019/20.

The scheme provides a new best practice for placing children and providing early support and is being evaluated by Cardiff University School of Psychology. An indication of its innovation and value is that it received The Institute of Collaboration ICW Innovation Award and a Highly Commended 1 Award in the GO Wales Social and Community benefit category.



Cofrestr Fabwysiadu **Cymru**
Wales Adoption Register

WALES ADOPTION REGISTER / ADOPTION REGISTER FOR WALES

We have worked hard in the past year to ensure that the new bilingual Wales Adopter Register, now called the Adoption Register for Wales (ARW) is ready to be launched. In order to do this the Central Team has:

- Commissioned a new partner, 'Link Maker', to provide a modern bi-lingual and on-line linking service;
- Linked with adoption services and agencies to support implementation of the new Adoption Register for Wales, raising awareness for staff use and ensuring transfer of information about children and adopters;
- Supported the development of a set of national guidelines, which outline expectations for use of the Register;
- Briefed partners, and stakeholders including Heads of Children's Services and Family Justice Network for Wales through the publication of regular bulletins.

The new Adoption Register for Wales came into operation in March 2019 and was formally launched in June 2019. The aim of the ARW is to improve how we match children to prospective adopters. It will be more user friendly and efficient and provides managed access for approved adopters. It will also allow the development of a 'keeping in touch' system for adopters as part of the improved adoption support arrangements.

Significantly, all children and adopters will be listed on the Register more quickly. It will facilitate matching, managed at a regional, Welsh and UK level when needed.

During its last year of operation the previous Wales Adoption Register:

- Matched 36 children through the register data base, Adoption Exchange Days and an Adoption Activity Day;
- Saw an increase in child referrals to the register during the year although the end of year figure as of March 2019 was 293, 57 less than the previous year;
- Saw changes in the profile of children waiting; over 60% being below the age of 3, fewer sibling groups and the percentage of those with additional or complex needs continued to rise;
- Saw the number of adopters referred to the register continuing to drop, with just 32 active for family finding at the end of the year. This reflects proactive family finding with many adopters being pre-linked by the time they are approved.

PRIORITY 2

Continuing to improve adoption support by implementing the NAS Adoption Support Framework

- Agreeing the next priorities and identifying funding
- Continuing things that are already helping e.g. improving Life Journey Work, improving 'adoption awareness' in schools and health services, changing the law for adoption support, improving training and development for adopters, consistent approaches across Wales.

WHY?

The Wales Adoption Cohort Study by Cardiff University shows that 47% of children who are placed for adoption had experienced at least 4 Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) before they were placed. This puts them in the highest risk group for later life difficulties, in line with just 14% of the general population. It is therefore critical that good support is available from the start as well as being accessible throughout childhood.

Adopted children have additional needs that emerge at different points in their lives and can continue into adulthood. These can include; understanding their identity as an adopted child, why they were adopted, managing contact and feelings of loss or grief. Many of these are issues are unique to adoptive families and require adoption informed support. Children, young people and adopters consistently report high levels of dissatisfaction with the process of getting help and sometimes with the quality of the help itself.

Research also tells us that adoption and the long-term legacy for children who have suffered significant harm are generally poorly understood. There is a particular need to improve awareness in schools, where adopted children are being excluded at a younger age and in greater numbers than their peers. Children who have been in care often have additional learning needs and a more complex mixture of difficulties.

It is a NAS priority to deliver high quality adoption services in Wales.

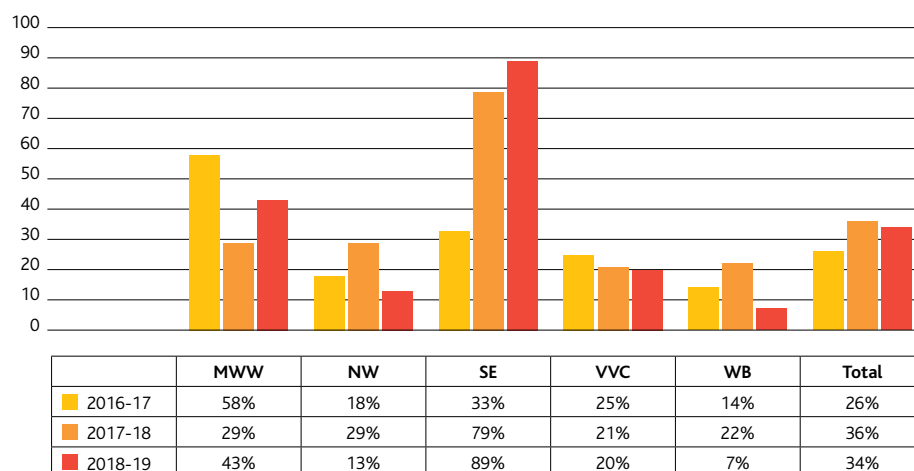
ADOPTION SUPPORT CARRIED OUT IN 2018/19

- More than 3,281 active letterbox contact arrangements were in place (a reduction from 2017/18)
- 819 birth parents were referred to adoption services in 2018/19 (a reduction from 2017/18) of these 98% were offered a service
- A service was provided to 268² birth parents
- 38 requests for support were received from birth sibling and other relatives (a reduction from 2017/18)
- 226 requests for access to birth records were received, an increase on the 205 for 2017/18
- 124 requests for intermediary / tracing support were received, a reduction on the 156 for 2017/18.

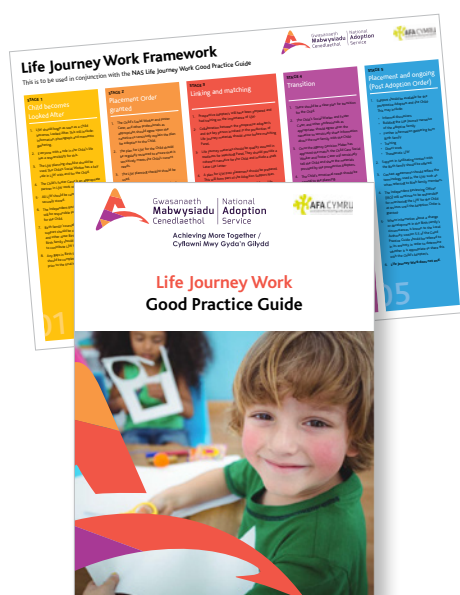
There was a slight reduction in the number of children who had an ongoing service established at point of placement, down from 112 (36%) in 2017/18 to 107 (34%). This masks significant regional variations as well as year on year changes within regions, linked to the fact that support packages are individualised.

² A number of regions were unable to provide data as required from their LA's. An additional region was unable to provide data due to the contractor going into administration.

Percentage of children placed for adoption whose plan for adoption support involved ongoing service provision at the point of placement



There were fewer new requests for post adoption support received, with decreases in 2 regions. There were 160 assessments for post adoption support completed, similar to previous figures. The majority of these completed assessments resulted in practical or therapeutic support being provided to families.



LIFE JOURNEY WORK

We have continued to implement and develop the new NAS Framework for 'Life Journey' work.

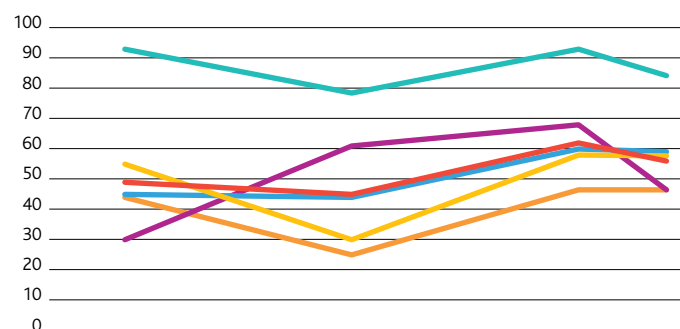
All children who cannot be cared for by their birth families, need to have an understanding of their family history and their unique journey. Life Journey Work is designed to help a child make sense of their past and understand their current situation in order to help them move into the future. Life journey work should support a child's identity, promote self-esteem, and help give the child a sense of belonging, wellbeing and support good mental health. The NAS website hosts guidance and existing tool kits around life journey work and we are currently working on making toolkits for children and young people, foster carers and birth parents available.

In November 2018 NAS was invited to present the 'Framework' developments within Wales to the Adoption UK national conference.

In January 2019 a conference was held in Wales to formally launch the Framework. Opened by the new Deputy Minister for health and Social Services, Julie Morgan, this highly successful event was oversubscribed with more than 110 delegates from across Wales attending, taking back the learning into their agencies.

Due to varying performance levels across Wales (from 83% to 46%) overall improvement has marginally declined. This will continue to be a priority area for NAS with all regions committing to making further improvements.

Percentage of children at second adoption review
with Life Journey materials in place



	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19
Mid & West Wales	92%	79%	92%	83%
North Wales	44%	25%	46%	46%
South East Wales	45%	43%	60%	59%
Vale, Valleys & Cardiff	30%	61%	68%	46%
Western Bay	55%	30%	58%	57%
WALES	49%	45%	62%	56%

Consultation with adopters was commissioned through our 'Adopter Voice' service with Adoption UK Cymru. We wanted to identify whether adopters were beginning to see improvements in the life journey materials being provided.

There was evidence of some improved satisfaction amongst adopters who had adopted more recently (within the last 3 years) suggesting that, whilst there is still some work to be done in terms of delivering the Life Journey framework, improvements are being made. Significantly, adopters suggested that:

- More training workshops are needed pre matching to prepare adopters.
- The most confident parents were the ones who had met with birth parents.
- Overall adopters preferred having accurate information and then making the life journey book themselves.

These comments will feed into the ongoing improvement project.



How did we do on our improvement priorities?

We have focussed this year on continuing to implement the NAS Adoption Support Framework which is key to successful outcomes. We were delighted when the Welsh Government announced that they were making available a £2.3m investment package from 2019/20; this will enable us to move forward with our focus on the agreed improvement priorities for the immediate future.

TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT FOR ADOPTERS

We have finalised the post-approval training package for adopters. This now includes twelve different modules, providing advanced information on areas that adopters asked for, such as; 'Attachment and Trauma', 'Parenting teenagers', 'Understanding and dealing with challenging behaviours' and 'Life Journey work'.

- This work was led by AFA Cymru and Adoption UK Cymru. The modules have been tested thoroughly including within regional services and will be launched during 2019/20.

We have improved our preparation training, with Adoption UK Cymru and AFA Cymru also leading on this working, utilising existing trainers to refresh and extend the preparation offer.

- This will also be launched during 2019/20 and will include a guide for prospective adopters outlining what to expect along with an individualised planner.



IMPROVING ADOPTION AWARENESS IN EDUCATION

NAS supports and works alongside the lead organisation Adoption UK in this area of work, with support provided by the Education Minister, as well as resources from the Welsh Government's 'Supporting Vulnerable Learners' section.

Adoption UK has continued to deliver its 'Adoption Support Wales – Getting it Right for Every Child' programme which extended its previous success; producing a school's guide and a parent's guide for working with adopted children

- Delivering a series of master classes supported by staff from the regional services to education professionals and adopters. This ensured they understood adoption, what it means for children and families and how they can shape and improve services to meet adopted children's needs.
- Delivering INSET training to 479 education staff in schools across Wales on the needs of adopted children
- Delivering education 'master classes' with 500 people participating and giving extremely positive feedback. The learning from this work has been made digitally available for use by school staff when supporting other adopted children.

NAS supported the launch of Adoption UK's 'Equal Chance' campaign, in Wales during June 2018. This UK wide campaign aims to ensure that adopted children have the same chances to education as other children by raising awareness of their particular needs for additional support.

The work was further supported when the Welsh Education Minister wrote to all schools encouraging them to co-operate in supporting adopted children within education services.

IMPROVING ADOPTION AWARENESS IN HEALTH SERVICES

NAS benefits from input by the Designated Doctor for the NHS National Safeguarding Team and a lead Medical Advisor from North Wales into its Advisory Group; they work with us on health-related matters as does the Welsh Government CAMHS lead.

- We worked with these key health advisors and industry experts Practice Solutions to develop a publication for health service staff; 'Care about Adoption – A Guide for Healthcare Professionals'. This will come into use during 2019/20.

The guide will enable health staff to positively contribute to the well-being of adopted children young people and their families.



NEW INITIATIVE IN ADOPTION SUPPORT TESSA

NAS worked alongside Adoption UK, to develop the Wales element, of a successful UK wide bid for funding from the National Lottery Community fund for the TESSA service.

TESSA – a therapeutic education support service for adoptive families began to be established in Wales in February 2019. It is the intention that NAS adds to the resources available for TESSA through match funding from the investment in 2019/20. The service sets out to deliver:

- > A focus on early intervention and support as soon as post-settling in concerns are raised
- > Professional psychological assessments for children, with information shared with parents and other support staff
- > 6-session therapeutic parenting support, delivered by teams consisting of a clinical psychologist and experienced adoptive parents (parent partners)
- > Ongoing parent partner support.



CHANGING TO KEEP PACE WITH THE 21ST CENTURY LIVING – CONTACT

NAS is continually seeking to improve adoption services informed by research and the life experiences of those affected by adoption, within a society that is continuously changing. This means that adoption policy and practice needs to develop, whilst keeping children's need for security and a sense of belonging firmly at its heart. Contact is one of the areas where this is most challenging.

In order for adopted children to be confident about their identity, they need information about their past. This requires us to change the 'clean break' approach to adoption of letterbox contact and annual exchanges of letters. We want to modernise contact to maintain children's rights to permanence and security, while enabling them to know and understand their history.

- We have been working with partners to respond to a recommendation from the Children's Commissioner for Wales, that NAS works with the Welsh Government *'to ensure that siblings' rights to contact are fully considered during adoption care planning'*.
- NAS attended and provided an issues paper for a scoping event with Welsh Government and other stakeholders.
- In order to get a better understanding of what would work better in sibling contact, we commissioned Adoption UK Cymru and the former After Adoption, to undertake consultation with adopters and adopted children and young people.
 - From an adopters' perspective this identified that contact arrangements, agreed at placement, often become unworkable and that there would be widespread benefit from increasing support to adopters and birth families. Practical areas for development were suggested including production of guidance, standardised templates and in-depth research to better understand what is best for children in terms of contact.
 - From a young person's perspective it was concluded that contact is positive and should be allowed and encouraged where possible, with young people stating that they felt the care they receive and connections they make, pre adoption, are an integral part of their early attachment and should be continued where they can³.

- We've continued to work with other partners and are collaborating with:
 - Voices from Care Cymru, to be part of an 'Event' to create change in how we support ongoing sibling relationships.
 - Swansea Law Centre, to produce an advice leaflet for adopted and looked after children.

WHAT ELSE HAS BEEN ACHIEVED?

We continued to request that Welsh Government brings entitlement to adoption support, into line with the Social Service and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014; Welsh Government has committed to doing this when the opportunity arises.

We continued to engage with adopters and children and young people to hear and understand their experiences through Adoption Voices and the former Talk Adoption services. We also focused on co-producing development where we could.

- Adopter Voice reports have been provided to all five regions and the third sector providers, for consideration by their management boards or equivalent.
- NAS worked with Adoption UK to develop the Wales section of their new Adoption Barometer which will be an annual survey gauging views from adopters. The first wave of this was distributed at the year, with an initial report expected in the Spring.

Most significantly, NAS has been involved this year in ensuring that a direct service for children and young people could continue, following the former After Adoption announcement that they would be withdrawing from providing services in Wales after March 2019.

We successfully worked with Adoption UK Cymru to support it to become the provider for this service, so that it could continue to support the circa 100 children and young people registered. We look forward to continuing to work with Adoption UK Cymru to expand and develop this valuable service.

³ The report was based on structured discussions with a very small number of children supplemented by informal information gathered through group sessions.

Regional & Voluntary Adoption Agencies Priorities and Achievements



AFA CYMRU

- Life Journey Work (LJW) – the annual conference was attended by over 100 people
- The LJW pack has been expanded to include materials for birth parents, young people and foster carers.
- Taking a collaborative approach to the development of post approval training courses – working alongside adopters and social workers to develop materials

BARNARDO'S

- The push within Barnardo's and NAS from an Equalities Diversity and Inclusion perspective has seen an increase in applications from people with more diverse backgrounds and cultures.
- Work to achieve an improvement in the timescales from Enquiry to Approval and ultimately placement of children

ADOPTION UK CYMRU

Many of our services are provided by volunteers who are also adoptive parents – between them they provided 984 hours of support to other adoptive parents.

- Established a buddy scheme for new adopters within the Adopting Together scheme.
- Worked with AFA Cymru to develop twelve training modules for use by adopters' post-adoption order, as well as new guidance and information for prospective adopters to be used during the preparation training.
- Delivered training to nearly 500 adoptive parents and delivered INSET training to 479 education staff in schools across Wales and responded to 1,376 contacts 25% higher than last year.
- As part of a UK wide project, Adoption UK Cymru were successful in an application to the Big Lottery Community Fund. This will provide therapeutic and educational input to adoptive families early in their adoption journey, in order to prevent difficulties building up over the coming years.

MID & WEST WALES

- Improved preparation arrangements in order to reduce delay for adopter assessments.
- Used social media to successfully increase attendance at Information Events.
- Produced an innovative short film with birth parent and adopters, which highlighted positive contact arrangements.

NORTH WALES

- Appointment of a Contact Coordinator Officer, offering a consistent response and support to adopters and birth parents, with in-direct and direct contact.
- Worked with expert Richard Rose, to implement the Life Story Framework.
- Expanded the Buddy scheme for adopters.
- Invested in upskilling Training Officer – completed Dyadic developmental psychotherapy level 2 and is currently undertaking a diploma in therapeutic parenting.

SOUTH EAST WALES

- Significant investment in workforce development including accessing innovative 'Circle of Security' training.
- Improved the information pack for adopters.
- Enhanced adopter's preparation training with greater focus on Therapeutic Models of parenting

ST DAVID'S CHILDREN SOCIETY

- External launch of Adopting Together Service and first placement made.
- Invested in upskilling social workers in Theraplay and DDP.
- Received two awards for Adopting Together – Winner of The Institute of Collaboration ICW Innovation Award and Highly Commended 1 in the GO Social and Community Benefit in Procurement Award.

VALE, VALLEYS & CARDIFF

- Appointment of a Marketing Officer offering a timely, consistent response to adopter enquiries and building knowledge of adopter demographic within the region.
- The development of the Life Journey Work 'champion' role resulting in positive progress in this area.
- Highest number of children placed for adoption since region was established.

WESTERN BAY

- Strengthened the work of our adoption panel on matching, by introducing a checklist to ensure that all the relevant information such as life journey materials, transition plans etc. are in place.
- Improved co-production; adopters have been involved in a quarterly form for adoption support and a successful inaugural profiling event to help approved adopters consider a wider range of children needing adoptive placements.
- Providing additional early support, where children with additional needs are placed with WBAS adopters.



PRIORITY 3

Forward thinking

- Thinking about the sort of adoption service we want for the future
- Continuing co-production and engagement with those who use adoption services
- Working to improve the legal, policy & evidence framework that affects adoption
- Encouraging the development of improved professional understanding and skills



WHY?

The National Adoption Service was created to improve services for all those affected by adoption in Wales. However, the needs and challenges faced by children presenting for adoption are changing rapidly and there is an on-going need to respond more consistently and effectively particularly in the areas of recruitment of adopters and ongoing support.

We also want to modernise the service to make adoption experience better for children, young people, and their adopters as well as others affected by adoption.

HOW DID WE DO?

We believe that adoption continues to provide good outcomes for children. The role of NAS is to ensure Welsh adoption services keep pace with the changing global environment of engagement and the way people live their lives.

We can and will contribute to the continued discussion about the role adoption plays in permanency planning across the country. Alongside this we will seek to continue to improve services through effective planning, informed by research and evidence from people who use our services.

The sections above gives an outline of the many things we have done to both deliver and improve services. We have also continued to engage in strategic and infrastructure work;

- We have considered the outcomes of the NAS Review of Arrangements which has been carried out for us, independently, by the Institute of Public Care. We have acted to implement the recommendations which will contribute to the streamline national level governance over the next year alongside looking at how we further improve accountability.



- Successfully secured marketing and recruitment support to increase adopter recruitment.
- Improved the integration of NAS policy work across local government and third sector organisations by working jointly with AFA Cymru so we can better influence more consistent and innovative practice.
- Provided advice to the Welsh Government for their proposed changes to adoption regulations as well as in relation to relevant education and safeguarding matters.
- Undertook work with the Adoption Leadership Board in England and Welsh services to ensure that Wales would stay in line with increases to the interagency adoption fee. These are paid when an adoptive placement is secured and purchased from another adoption agency. This led to the Welsh VAA's agreeing a short delay to allow Welsh local authorities time to plan in the adjustment.
- Put in place alternative arrangements for the NAS Performance Monitoring System when the current contract runs out in June 2019. Expert advice has been commissioned, working with Data Unit Wales to develop a service specification, which will deliver a flexible, easy to use system to improve accuracy and support. This will provide us with flexibility to join up with the Wales Community Care Information System in the future.
- Supported practice development
 - Inter-country adoption training was commissioned and delivered
 - Post commencement training was commissioned and delivered
 - Continued to share research and good practice across the regional collaboratives and to use the evaluation emerging from initiatives such as the 'Adopting Together' service.
 - Shared learning from significant cases, specifically, this year, the child practice review by the Regional Safeguarding Children Board in Wales, into the death of an adopted child. The central team worked with the adoption region and will be holding an all Wales practice seminar to share the learning.
- Worked to advocate and develop a business case which has resulted in Welsh Government investing £2.3 million ongoing funding to improve adoption services.

PLANS FOR 2019/20 ONWARDS

This plan will build on the improvements made over the first five years of NAS; with the significant benefit of the availability of new investment funding.

This is in the form of £2.3m from Welsh Government for service improvement; around £250,000 via Adoption UK Cymru for TESSA from the Big Lottery and Communities Fund, in addition to grant aid of around £300,000 to the Voluntary Adoption Agencies from Welsh Government Third Sector grant scheme currently agreed up to 2020.

The National Adoption Service will continue to work to deliver services to high numbers of children, young people and families and others affected by adoption; mainly through NAS regional services and the Voluntary Adoption Agencies. The core business of the service will continue to be, recruiting adopters so that children who cannot be cared for by their own families can live in stable, loving homes as the best alternative.

The work of NAS is closely linked with the Welsh Government Ministerial Advisory Group for Children (MAG). Adoption features across the numerous work streams of this important national initiative.

Improvement priorities for 2019/20



The National Adoption Service was created to improve services for all those affected by adoption in Wales.

The National Adoption Service (NAS) for Wales, launched in November 2014, is an innovative collaborative for the provision of adoption services. It brought together Welsh local authority adoption services into a three-tier structure which includes partnerships at all levels with Voluntary Adoption Agencies based in Wales, Health and Education Services, as well as others.

At local authority level, all 22 Welsh councils continue to provide services to all looked after children whilst identifying and working with those children for whom a plan for adoption is appropriate.

Regionally, local authorities work together within five regional collaboratives to provide a range of adoption services. Each regional collaborative has links with the voluntary adoption agencies, health and education. The services provided differ in each collaborative but all provide the adoption agency functions for children, recruit and assess adopters, offer counselling to birth parents and advice to adopted adults. Some currently directly provide adoption support services, whereas in others this remains with their local authorities.



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RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET

23RD JANUARY 2020

DELEGATE AUTHORITY TO ENFORCE THE PROVISIONS OF THE RENTING OF HOMES (FEES ETC) (WALES) ACT 2019

REPORT OF DIRECTOR PUBLIC HEALTH, PROTECTION AND COMMUNITY SERVICES IN DISCUSSION WITH THE RELEVANT PORTFOLIO HOLDER CLLR RHYS LEWIS

**Author(s): Neil Pilliner, Environmental Protection & Housing Standards
Manager and Ian Lester, Senior Environmental Health Officer**

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to delegate authority to the Director of Public Health, Protection and Community Services and to the single Licensing Authority in Wales (Rent Smart Wales) to use the enforcement powers of the Renting of Homes (Fees etc) (Wales) Act 2019.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Cabinet:

- 2.1 Give delegated authority to the Director of Public Health, Protection & Community Services for enforcing the provisions of the Renting of Homes (Fees etc.) (Wales) Act 2019 and note that the Monitoring Officer would make any consequential amendment(s) required to the Council's Constitution.
- 2.2 Give delegated authority to the Operational Manager for Rent Smart Wales for enforcing the provisions of the Renting Homes (Fees etc.) (Wales) Act 2019 on behalf of Cardiff City Council and note that the Monitoring Officer would make any consequential amendment(s) required to the Council's Constitution.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 To enable enforcement of the new legislation to be implemented by Officers in the Public Health, Protection & Community Services Department.

- 3.2 To ensure that enforcement powers are also delegated to Rent Smart Wales, with whom the Council work in partnership, for the enforcement of this legislation.

4. BACKGROUND

- 4.1 The Renting Homes (Fees etc.) (Wales) Act 2019 came into force on 5th May 2019. Since 1st September 2019, letting agents and landlords who manage their own properties are prevented from charging any fees before, during or after a tenancy unless specifically exempt in the Act. Such a banned payment is called a 'prohibited payment'.
- 4.2 Letting agents and self-managing landlords are also banned from requiring a tenant to take out a loan or enter into a contract for services.
- 4.3 Enforcement of these new requirements can be undertaken by the Council and Rent Smart Wales (as the Single Licencing Authority) and will contribute to a fairer and more transparent experience for tenants relying on the private rented sector. Welsh Government (WG) advises that any costs associated with renting in the private sector should be reasonable, affordable and transparent.
- 4.4 The Act defines permitted payments that can be required by letting agents and self-managing landlords as:
- Rent;
 - Holding deposits;
 - Security deposits;
 - Payments in respect utilities (e.g. council tax, television, licence and communication services);
 - Payments in default (where tenant has done something wrong e.g. lost keys, late payment of rent).

WG intends to introduce regulations to define such payments by the end of 2019.

- 4.5 Any payments other than those listed in 4.4 above would be banned and prohibited. Where any rent payment, in one period, is greater than the amount of rent payable in any other period during the contract, the difference (a 'rent fluctuation') is also considered a prohibited payment. There is an exception where there is a 'permitted variation' agreed between landlord and tenant.
- 4.6 'Holding deposits' are limited to one week's rent and must be repaid within seven days of the contract being agreed. If the tenancy contract is not agreed, the deposit must, subject to limited exceptions, be repaid within 15 days.

- 4.7 There will be no change to existing legislation governing ‘security deposits’, but Welsh Ministers now have the power to cap them. There are no plans to legislate for a cap but WG will be monitoring trends in deposits and will only regulate if necessary.
- 4.8 Failure to comply with the provisions in the Act, in the following ways, will restrict the landlord’s ability to serve a valid notice of possession (“no fault”, Section 21 possessions):
- A prohibited payment has been required and paid, but not re-paid by the letting agent/self-managing landlord;
 - A holding deposit has not been repaid.
- 4.9 The Council is responsible for enforcing this legislation in partnership with Rent Smart Wales (RSW). All 22 Welsh Councils have agreed to a memorandum of understanding with RSW in relation to the regulation of the Private Rented Housing Sector.
- 4.10 RSW will take enforcement action in place of Local Authorities in limited circumstances:
- Where RSW is undertaking an audit of an agent and find evidence of non-compliance;
 - Where RSW is taking enforcement action for Housing (Wales) Act 2014 offences (e.g. no registered with RSW) and tenant fee contraventions are found;
 - Other exceptional circumstances to be agreed on a case by case basis with the Local Authority.
- 4.11 Local Authorities are primarily responsible for enforcing the requirements and have a duty to inform the Licensing Authority (Rent Smart Wales (RSW)) if they take enforcement action. Rent Smart Wales will also inform Local Authorities if they serve a fixed penalty notice or prosecute.
- 4.12 There are two formal enforcement options available to the Council and RSW:
- Issue of a fixed penalty notice (FPN) of £1,000, the payment of which would avoid prosecution proceedings. However, non-payment would lead to prosecution;
 - Prosecution for offences under the Act which could result in a fine not subject to a minimum on the standard scale of fines (except for failure to provide information required by statutory notice, in which case a fine up to level 4 on the standard scale could be imposed by a judge).

4.13 Sections 17(2) and (3) of the Renting Homes (Fees etc) (Wales) Act 2019 enable Rent Smart Wales to take the above mentioned enforcement actions but it will be necessary for the Council to authorise RSW (Cardiff City Council) to do so.

4.14 The above enforcement action will be taken in accordance with the Council's Enforcement Policy to ensure consistency, proportionality and fairness.

5. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

5.1 This is not applicable as the Authority has a statutory duty to enforce the provisions of this Act. Any enforcement action will be undertaken in accordance with the Council's Corporate Enforcement Policy.

6. CONSULTATION

6.1 None was considered necessary as this is a new statutory requirement.

7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)

7.1 The necessary resources to enforce this legislation will be undertaken within the current allocated budget for Public Health, Protection & Community Services. The additional regulatory burden of this legislation has been the subject of the financial assessment by Welsh Government. It is considered that the fixed penalty (£1000 per offence) or Court cost awards will cover the financial impact incurred.

8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED

8.1 Legal and probity issues have been considered. By virtue of the Regulation of Private Rented Housing (Designation of Licensing Authority)(Wales) Order 2015, Cardiff City Council is designated as the Licensing Authority for the whole of Wales. The service operates under the name Rent Smart Wales hosted by Cardiff Council and ensures compliance with the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 in partnership with all 22 Welsh Local Authorities. Formal authorisation is required in respect of the Renting Homes (Fees etc.)(Wales) Act 2019, in order to ensure that all relevant powers can be exercised from the 1st September 2019.

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

- 9.1 It links with the Economy and Place priorities of the Corporate Plan as the changes introduced by the new legislation will protect tenants by reducing financial exploitation.
- 9.2 Use of the enforcement powers are also consistent with the Well-being Goals under the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 as protecting tenants against financial exploitation will contribute to:
- A healthier Wales – a society in which people’s physical and mental wellbeing is maximised and in which choices and behaviours that benefit future health are understood;
 - A Wales of cohesive communities – attractive, viable, safe and well connected communities;
 - A more equal Wales - A society that enables people to fulfil their potential no matter what their background or circumstances (including their socio economic background and circumstances).

10. CONCLUSION

- 10.1 The provisions of the Renting Homes (Fees etc) (Wales) Act 2019 prevents Letting Agents and Landlords (who manage their own properties) from charging any fees before, during or after a tenancy unless specifically exempt in the Act. Delegating authority to the Director - Public Health, Protection and Community Services and Rent Smart Wales (as the Single Licencing Authority) to enforce these new requirements will contribute to a fairer and more transparent experience for tenants relying on the private rented sector.

Other Information:-

Relevant Scrutiny Committee
Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

AS AMENDED BY

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET

23rd JANUARY 2020

**REPORT OF DIRECTOR PUBLIC HEALTH, PROTECTION AND
COMMUNITY SERVICES IN DISCUSSION WITH THE RELEVANT
PORTFOLIO HOLDER CLLR RHYS LEWIS**

**DELEGATE AUTHORITY TO ENFORCE THE PROVISIONS OF THE
RENTING OF HOMES (FEES ETC) (WALES) ACT 2019**

Background papers:

None

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RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET

23RD JANUARY 2020

THE COUNCIL'S 2020/2021 REVENUE BUDGET

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF FINANCE AND DIGITAL SERVICES

AUTHOR: Barrie Davies (01443 424026)

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 This report provides Cabinet with information in respect of the 2020/2021 local government settlement and the outcomes of the budget consultation phase 1 exercise, to assist with its deliberations in formulating the revenue budget strategy for the financial year 2020/21, 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 set out in the "Budget and Policy Framework" within the Council's Constitution.
- 2.2 To note and consider the outcomes of the budget consultation phase 1 process.
- 2.3 Consider and if appropriate agree the draft 2020/2021 Revenue Budget Strategy, detailed in the attached Discussion Paper 'Appendix A', as the basis upon which a second phase of consultation will take place.
- 2.4 Agree the draft timetable for setting the 2020/2021 revenue budget as set out at Appendix A2.
- 2.5 Agree to receive feedback from the second phase of budget consultation in order to consider and determine the final budget strategy for submission to Council.

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

3.0 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The revenue budget for the financial year ending the 31st March 2021, 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.
- 3.3 A draft timetable for agreeing the 2020/2021 revenue budget strategy is attached at Appendix A2.

4.0 THE KEY ELEMENTS OF A BALANCED BUDGET STRATEGY FOR 2020/2021

- 4.1 The Council’s Senior Leadership Team have considered budget strategy options throughout the Autumn and in light of emerging delays to the WG Local Government Settlement timescales as a consequence of Central Government planned spending reviews, Brexit and latterly the General Election.
- 4.2 I have reported on the implications of the provisional settlement and on our updated budget requirement to Council on the 15th January 2020 and set this out in detail in the discussion paper attached at Appendix A.
- 4.3 Based on the provisional settlement and alongside our updated base budget requirement, reflecting the continuing increased pressures across many of our services, I have also set out a high level robust and balanced budget strategy option which would include a Council Tax increase of 2.85%.
- 4.4 The outcome from the Phase 1 budget consultation process is also now available for Cabinet to consider alongside the proposals.

- 4.5 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 avoiding an excessive increase in the Council Tax levied by the County Borough Council.

5.0 EQUALITY & DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 In developing the draft 2020/2021 Revenue Budget Strategy, an Equality Impact Assessment has been undertaken to ensure that:
- (i) the Council meets the requirements of the Public Sector Equality Duties; and
 - (ii) due regard has been taken of the likely impact of the recommendations in terms of equality and discrimination.

6.0 CONSULTATION

- 6.1 The proposed approach to budget consultation for 2020/21 is set out in the Cabinet report dated 17th October 2019 and in the delegated decision of the Service Director for Democratic Services and Communication dated 14th November 2019. It comprises 2 phases as follows :

Phase 1 - provided residents and stakeholders with the opportunity to feedback their views on some of the key strategic building blocks used to construct the Council's budget.

Phase 2 - once Cabinet have agreed a draft budget strategy, and in light of the provisional local government settlement, then this draft strategy will itself be consulted upon as part of Phase 2.

7.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 The financial modelling assumptions and implications are set out in Appendix A of this report.

8.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS or LEGISLATION CONSIDERED

- 8.1 The Council has a legal duty under the Local Government Finance Act 1992 to set a balanced budget and also a legal duty under the Local Government Act 2000 for it to be reported to and approved by Full Council. The construction of the draft 2020/2021 Revenue

Budget Strategy in line with the “Budget and Policy Framework”, as set out in the Council’s Constitution, will support compliance with the abovementioned legal requirements.

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

- 9.1 The draft budget strategy will be a key enabler for the delivery of the Council’s Corporate Plan and in doing so will support wider partnership objectives and the Well-Being of Future Generations Act.

10.0 CONCLUSIONS

- 10.1 The Senior Leadership Team holds the collective view that the Council should commit itself to setting its 2020/2021 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.
- 10.2 A translation of the Senior Leadership Team’s recommended strategic approach into a high level budget for 2020/2021 with a Council Tax increase of 2.85% is attached to this report.
- 10.3 Given that the financial resources currently available to the Council are finite and that future local government settlements continue to be uncertain, the Senior Leadership Team believes that an ongoing, robust medium-term financial strategy is essential to ensure that our core public services continue to be improved.

APPENDIX A

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

23rd JANUARY 2020

A DISCUSSION PAPER PREPARED BY THE SENIOR LEADERSHIP TEAM IN RESPONSE TO THE 2020/2021 LOCAL GOVERNMENT SETTLEMENT

**AUTHOR: BARRIE DAVIES, DIRECTOR OF FINANCE AND DIGITAL 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 31st March 2021, the Cabinet must consider:
- The Council's own financial position.
 - The financial and service implications of the Welsh Government's (WG) 2020-2021 local government settlement.
 - Our Cwm Taf – Cwm Taf Wellbeing Plan 2018 -2023.
 - The Council's Corporate Plan 2016 – 2020 and draft updated Corporate Plan 2020 - 2024.
 - 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 2020/2021 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 2019/20. A key starting point and important consideration is the annual statement of accounts. At the Council meeting on the 31st July 2019, I presented the Council's audited accounts, which reported General Fund Balances amounting to £10.498M.

- 2.2 Given the continuing financial pressures the Council is working under, it remains my view, that the Council should hold a minimum of £10M as General Fund Balances, (i.e. its working balance). This level is set given the context of the need for continued strong financial management that is felt to be essential to ensure that the Council maintains financial flexibility and stability going forward.
- 2.3 Members will be aware that in addition to General Fund Reserves, the Council also holds a number of earmarked reserves that are kept under continuous review and are assessed each year by the Wales Audit Office. Members will be aware that included in these Reserves is a Medium Term Financial Planning and Service Transformation Reserve that has successfully supported transitional funding as part of the Council's Medium Term Service Planning arrangements. It has achieved this through helping to smooth the delivery of budget savings over a number of years, whilst still allowing an annual balanced budget to be delivered. The starting point for the Medium Term Financial Planning and Service Transformation Reserve as at the 31st March 2019 is £3.303M. 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 £4.363M (additional in year savings to date of £0.606M plus the reinstatement of resources (£0.454M) following confirmation of government funding in respect of the firefighters pension cost increases by South Wales Fire and Rescue Authority).
- 2.4 The Wales Audit Office continues to emphasise that we must remain disciplined, if we are to maintain our long-term goal of driving forward continuous improvement of key services, though this becomes increasingly harder to achieve following a period of such severe financial pressures.
- 2.5 I believe the Wales Audit Office assessment is an accurate one and it is clear that Members continue to take their fiduciary duty extremely seriously as evidenced by the positive reports received from the regulators and the track record of budgetary control across services. The challenge, therefore, is to construct a prudent, equitable and fair revenue budget for the financial year ending the 31st March 2021. 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 2020/2021 LOCAL GOVERNMENT SETTLEMENT

- 3.1 The timing of the Local Government Settlement for 2020/21 has been extremely uncertain throughout the Autumn period as a consequence of the originally planned Comprehensive Spending Review, Brexit and latterly, the General Election.
- 3.2 On the 16th December 2019, the Minister for Housing and Local Government (Julie James AM) announced the Provisional 2020/2021 Local Government Settlement. The Minister's statement and key data table is attached at Appendix 3.
- 3.3 The "headlines" of the 2020/2021 Provisional Settlement are as follows:-

- a. The overall increase in Revenue Support Grant (RSG) and Non-Domestic Rates (NDR) funding for 2020/2021 (of unhypothecated funding) at an all Wales level, after adjusting for transfers is 4.3% (+£184M).
- b. The settlement for Rhondda Cynon Taf, amounts to an increase of **4.5%** which is above the average of 4.3%. Settlement figures across Wales range from 3.0% to 5.4%.
- c. No 'floor' protection has been included for 2020/21.
- d. The Settlement figures for 2020/21 include transfers into the settlement in respect of NHS Funded Nursing Care (£1.9M), the Teachers Pay Grant (£12.0M) and the Teachers Pensions Grant (£39.1M). There is also a transfer in respect of the Coastal Risk Management Programme (not applicable to this Council). The values for this Council are £0.146M, £0.990M and £3.222M respectively. Whilst the part year (2019/20) implications of the Teachers Pay Grant and Teachers Pension Grant transfer into the settlement, the additional full year implications are to be funded from within the settlement increase.
- e. There is no indication of settlement levels beyond 2020/21.
- f. Provisional figures and indicative estimates are included for specific grants, at an all Wales level. Of particular note, would be the continuation and increase (from £30M to £40M) in the Social Care Workforce and Sustainability Pressures Grant. This funds our core base budget.
- g. The Council's General Capital Funding allocation has increased by £0.236M to £13.677M.

4.0 IMPLICATIONS OF THE 2020/2021 PROVISIONAL SETTLEMENT

- 4.1 The provisional settlement indicates that our 2020/2021 RSG and NDR funding will total £388.666M.
- 4.2 In anticipation of the 2020/2021 local government settlement, the Council's service managers have constructed base budget requirements for next financial year. Those initial calculations provided for:-
 - Estimated employee costs, 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 any additional burdens imposed on the Council.
- 4.3 The Provisional Settlement is better than modelled in the most recent Medium Term Financial Plan and recognises some of the intense funding pressures which are being experienced across local government in general but also within Rhondda Cynon Taf.
- 4.4 Members have continued to receive updates on the projections of the Council's revenue budget position for the period to 2022/23, as part of our Medium Term

Financial Planning (MTPF) arrangements. The latest of these assessments was considered by Council on the 31st July 2019 where, based on the financial projections at that time, a starting point budget gap of £15.591M was projected which increased to £24.307M in the absence of One Off Funding provided during 2019/20 continuing and without costs associated with the Teachers Pension Fund increases being funded.

- 4.5 The continuation of funding for one off and teachers pension costs has now been clarified through the provisional settlement and so we can now update our modelling with greater certainty in this regard. The provisional settlement also includes an increase to the Social Care Workforce and Sustainability Pressures Grant. The impact of this funding confirmation is shown in table 1 below.

Table 1 : Confirmation of One-Off Funding

	£'000
Budget Gap at MTPF (July 2019)	24,307
One off Funding transferred into base at Provisional Settlement	- 4,212
Continuation and Increase in Social Services Grant	- 3,400
Revised Budget Gap	16,695

- 4.6 We have also during the last few months continued to refresh our base budget requirements for 2020/21. Inescapable budget pressures have now been updated and include additional costs in respect of :
- specialist accommodation requirements within social care settings (£1.8M)
 - demographic demand led pressures in social care (£1.5M)
 - provision of recycling bags - dry and food waste (£0.2M)
 - running costs of the Ron Jones Athletics Stadium (£0.15M)
 - Free School Meals (£0.3M)
 - Home Tuition (£0.1M)
- 4.7 Inflation and Pay pressures include providing adequate provision for teaching and non-teaching pay awards, updated costs for the funding of voluntary retirements and additional workforce costs in respect of all our services including Social Care. These additional costs have been offset by a reduction in pension costs associated with the Local Government Pension Scheme.
- 4.8 Members will also recall the decision which was made in December 2015 to terminate the Council's PFI scheme at Garth Olwg. The arrangement formally ended in January 2017, but there have been legal issues to conclude since that point. On the 21st November 2019, the legal process was finally concluded and the financial implications of this can now be factored into the Council's ongoing revenue budget requirement. This amounts to an ongoing revenue base budget saving of £2.527M.
- 4.9 Other updates include an increase to our estimated Capital Charges and a required on-going cost associated with our digital programme which will facilitate future release of efficiencies through greater productivity, agile working and reductions in our office accommodation requirements.
- 4.10 These updates are summarised in table 2 below.

Table 2 : Base Budget Updates

Base Budget Updates	£'000
Inescapable Budget Pressures	4,060
Inflation and Pay	2,030
Capital Charges	750
Digital Programme	1,000
PFI Reduction	- 2,527
Total Base Budget Updates	5,313

- 4.11 As already referenced, the provisional settlement provides clarity on the funding available to schools and alongside their resource requirement. This has now been updated to reflect the school budget requirement.
- 4.12 As referenced at section 3, the provisional settlement provides this Council with an uplift of 4.5%. This compares with the MTFP assumption, based on planning information available at that time, of a 0% uplift. The impact of our updated tax base can also now be reflected.
- 4.13 The combined effects of the above updates is shown in table 3 below.

Table 3 : Revised Budget Gap at Provisional Settlement

	£'000
Revised Budget Gap	16,695
Base Updates	5,313
Additional Resource for Schools	4,036
Provisional Settlement - Additional Resources to MTFP Assumptions	- 17,342
Revised Budget Gap	8,702

- 4.14 In order to close the remaining budget gap, savings proposals were set out in the July MTFP (relating to the Materials Recycling Facility, Day Centres, Office Accommodation and Home Care Charges) amounting to £1.199M.
- 4.15 In addition, an efficiency target was set at £6M and since this point, services have been working to identify proposals to deliver to this target without impacting on front line services. It is confirmed that this target has now been met and can therefore be included in the Council's base budget requirement for next year.
- 4.16 On the 10th December 2019, the Llwydcoed Crematorium Joint Committee considered and agreed a report which proposed an annual redistribution from the accounts of the Joint Committee to Rhondda Cynon Taf and Merthyr Councils. For this Council an amount of £0.182M can be factored into our ongoing budget requirement.
- 4.17 The impact of these now agreed budget reduction measures is shown in table 4 below.

Table 4 : Confirmed Savings and Remaining Budget Gap

	£'000
Revised Budget Gap	8,702
Savings Already Identified (per MTFP)	- 1,199
Efficiency Target	- 6,000
Llwydcoed Crematorium	- 182
Remaining Budget Gap	1,321

- 4.18 This reflects the position which was reported to Council on the 15th January 2020 and it is against this backdrop that we must consider our budget strategy for 2020/21.

5.0 DEVELOPING AN EQUITABLE, DELIVERABLE AND BALANCED BUDGET FOR 2020/2021

- 5.1 Notwithstanding the more positive settlement from WG for 2020/21, it does follow a sustained period of real term reductions to our funding levels and it is against this context that we need to develop a balanced budget for next year. There remain significant pressures 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 protects and develops our key services.
- 5.2 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 we have adopted to date 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.
- 5.3 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.
- 5.4 As part of our updated budget requirement, appropriate sums have been set aside for these corporate financial requirements.

6.0 COUNCIL TAX LEVELS

- 6.1 This Council has always acted reasonably when setting its Council Tax, balancing the impact upon services and the ability of the public to pay, recognising that those eligible will receive support through the Welsh Government's Council Tax Reduction Scheme (CTRS). The original modelled

proposal was to increase Council Tax in 2020/21 by 3.00%. This was consistent with the level which we have used in our modelling for some time and is a lower level of increase than we have implemented over recent years. It is now proposed that Council Tax be increased by **2.85%** for next year. This will increase the remaining budget gap by £0.132M.

- 6.2 Members will be aware that the costs of the CTRS impacts 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 £1.126M (at the 2020/21 tax base level), but will also cost £0.243M in additional CTRS requirements. It therefore follows that a 1% increase generates a net additional income of £0.883M, or stated another way, 22% of any Council Tax increase is lost to support the increased costs associated with the Welsh Government's CTRS.

7.0 SCHOOLS BUDGET (ISB)

- 7.1 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.
- 7.2 As part of the initial budget modelling assumptions (July 2019) a £1.5M cash uplift for schools had been built into the Medium Term Financial Plan.
- 7.3 Following the clarity provided through the provisional settlement with regard to funding for Teachers Pension Costs and Teachers Pay award (2019) costs, these amounts have now been passed on, fully, to our schools. In addition, funding is also provided to cover, in full, pay and non-pay inflation and pressures, including the baselining of one-off and passported funding (£2.5M) which was provided for the 2019/20 budget. Schools are therefore fully funded for 2020/21.
- 7.4 In overall terms, the proposal sees the Schools Budget (ISB) increase from £148.9M to £161.6M, an increase of £12.7M, or 8.5%.

8.0 BUDGET STRATEGY PROPOSALS

- 8.1 This Council has taken a proactive approach to dealing with the continued real term reductions in resources it has received in recent years and has continued to deliver saving proposals early with a clear focus maintained across the medium term planning horizon. The Council has continued to deliver robust, balanced budgets and taken the opportunity to use our Medium Term Financial Planning and Service Transformation Reserve, as transition funding, to sensibly support the overall budget strategy. This approach is one which I would recommend is continued.
- 8.2 The Cabinet have always been focussed on protecting our front line services and have taken any opportunities to prioritise or reallocate resources to areas of priority.
- 8.3 For 2020/21, the following proposals are set out for Cabinet's consideration.

a. NDR Local Relief Scheme

Cabinet have already initiated a consultation on a proposal to introduce a local discretionary relief scheme for Non Domestic Rates (NDR). The

consultation closes on the 24th January and Cabinet will subsequently determine how they wish to progress. As referenced in the Cabinet report, resources have already been set aside in the Medium Term Financial Plan to provide further support to our town centres and businesses so there is no further financial impact on our base budget.

b. Youth Engagement / Youth Offending

The Council recognises the ongoing need to work proactively across our services, with our schools and partners to ensure the effectiveness of our youth engagement activities both within and outside of a school environment and to ensure that there are opportunities for young people across the County Borough to reach their full potential and overcome barriers to learning and progression. Our current core spend on Youth Engagement amounts to £1.9M and it is proposed that an additional revenue investment of £250k is made in this area, representing a budget increase of over 13%.

c. Paddling Pools

Following a number of voluntary groups being able to open paddling pools during last summer, the Council will now work wider with community groups and put in place a package of bespoke support that will enable further paddling pools to open throughout the summer holiday period going forward (subject to the preparedness of community groups). £50k is proposed to be included within the budget strategy for this purpose.

d. Prudential Borrowing for Investment in our Infrastructure

Following the investment of over £95M being made in our infrastructure and corporate priorities since 2015, it is proposed to set aside £500k of our revenue resource to enable, through the use of prudential borrowing powers, £7.5M of capital resource to be further invested in our priority investment areas. This will include strategic highways developments, parks and green spaces and continued investment in extra care facilities. Full details of this spend will be set out in the forthcoming updated capital programme.

e. Supporting the Muni Arts Centre

The Council has been working with Awen Cultural Trust to secure a sustainable future for the Muni Arts Centre alongside an ambitious longer term plan to substantially refurbish the Centre. Whilst these longer term plans are being developed along with a potential funding package, it is confirmed that the initial plan is to reopen the venue during the summer of 2020 (following initial maintenance works). In order to support the reopening, whilst the longer term vision is being developed, there is a need for a revenue contribution to be made amounting to £140k per annum. The revenue support will be ring-fenced and the part year revenue budget requirement is £105k.

f. Fees and Charges

A final report on the proposed level of Fees & Charges for 2020/21 will be presented to Cabinet on the 20th February 2020. Following the initial (Phase

1) consultation exercise undertaken during late November and December, the Cabinet's draft proposals with regard to fees and charges would see a standard increase of 1.5% (CPI), with a number of specific exceptions :

Area of Charge	Proposed Exception
Leisure for Life	Freeze
Car Park Charges	Freeze
Summer and Winter Playing Fees (sports clubs)	Freeze
Meals on Wheels / Day Centre Meals	10p per meal
School Meals	5p per meal
Lido	50p Adult Swim

The impact of these draft proposals would cost £6k.

g. Home to School Transport Re-tender Savings

Following a number of successful retendering exercises over recent years, delivering reduced costs of our provision, a review of the Home to School Transport budget has now concluded that £810k can be released from the base budget requirement.

h. Council Tax Reduction Scheme (CTRS)

Members will be aware through the quarterly performance reports this year that the costs associated with the CTRS have been consistently below budget. As at Quarter 2 (reported 21st November 2019), the projected underspend in this area was £0.352M. Further work on caseloads and demand has now been concluded and the proposal is to reduce the base budget in 2020/21 by £0.350M. It should be noted that whilst this takes the budget to £24.680M, this is still in excess of the Welsh Government funding for this area which for 2020/21 totals £21.564M.

i. Supported Accommodation Strategy and Savings

In addition to the Council's ongoing investment in developing extra care facilities, Cabinet have also agreed to capital investment in developing supported accommodation at Penllew Court and Crown Avenue. These facilities are now nearing completion and will be available for occupancy during 2020/21. The revenue savings (part year) which we can now build into our base budget for 2020/21 is £400k.

- 8.4 The implications of the above strategy proposals, including the proposed reduction in the level of Council Tax increase, on the remaining budget gap position is shown in the table 5 below.

Table 5 : Budget Strategy Proposals 2020/21

	£'000	£'000
Remaining Budget Gap		1,321
NDR Local Relief Scheme	-	
Additional Resources to Support Youth Engagement	250	
Paddling Pools	50	
Prudential Borrowing - Investment (£7.5M)	500	
Muni Arts Centre - Revenue Support	105	
Council Tax at 2.85%	132	
Fees and Charges	6	
Home to School Re-tender Savings	- 810	
CTRS	- 350	
Supported Accommodation Savings	- 400	- 517
Remaining Budget Gap		804

8.5 *Medium Term Financial Planning and Service Transformation Reserve (Transitional Funding)* – We have for many years used our transition funding reserve sensibly as part of our balanced budget strategy, at a level which does not compromise the robustness of our budget and which can be replenished with some certainty, given our ongoing strategy of delivering savings early.

8.6 As previously referenced the reserve currently stands at £4.363M, having been replenished during this year (2019/20) by £1.060M to quarter 2. Accordingly, to address the remaining budget gap, it is proposed that an allocation of £0.804M is made from this reserve for 2020/21. This would facilitate a balanced budget for 2020/21 and would leave £3.559M in the reserve (subject to the year-end assessment of reserves). I am confident that processes are now sufficiently well embedded to ensure that savings are achieved in-year and that this reserve can continue to be replenished.

	£'000
Remaining Budget Gap	804
Use of Transition Funding	- 804
Remaining Budget Gap	-

8.7 The above provides a robust and balanced budget strategy which can be recommended to Cabinet and Council.

9.0 **MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLANNING**

9.1 Whilst the focus for this report is necessarily on 2020/21, the pressures on our services and the absence of any firm indications of future settlement levels means that our Medium Term Financial and Service Planning arrangements remain key to ensuring that financial stability is maintained as the cornerstone of our overall financial health as a Council.

9.2 Medium Term Service Planning remains extremely challenging in the absence of any indication or certainty of ongoing funding levels and it will be critical that

we maintain our flexibility to respond accordingly to annual settlement levels within the context of our own medium term planning arrangements.

- 9.3 The delivery of efficiency savings early and as part of our medium term planning has placed us extremely well in our ability to respond to funding challenges and uncertainties and continues to contribute to the delivery of a lean, efficient and effective organisation.
- 9.4 The future quantum of such savings however must be considered and reflected upon in light of what has been delivered to date (£95M over the last 10 years) and what can reasonably continue to be delivered without impacting on our front line services and having an unintended consequence elsewhere.

10.0 SERVICE PRIORITIES

- 10.1 Even within a 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.
- 10.2 Our future and ongoing aspirations are also set out in the new draft Corporate Plan "Making a Difference" 2020-2024 which is currently being consulted upon.
- 10.3 The Senior Leadership Team have had due regard to the new draft plan in formulating the proposals set out in this report.
- 10.4 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 Council has already invested over £95M (over and above the normal Capital Programme) in areas supporting key Corporate Plan priorities since October 2015, the latest investment (£5.8M) being agreed by Council in October 2019.
- 10.5 A report setting out the updated capital programme for 2020/21 to 2022/23 will be reported for Members consideration shortly.

11.0 2020/2021 SERVICE GROUP BUDGETS

- 11.1 The Council adopts a comprehensive budget challenge process involving finance officers and senior managers from each Service area, with a subsequent detailed review and assessment being conducted by the Senior Leadership Team, to ensure consistency and fairness across all service areas.
- 11.2 The 2019/2020 revenue budget and the regular performance monitoring reports are available to the Cabinet, to act as a benchmark to evaluate service delivery options, priorities and savings proposals. It is, of course, important to note 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 provision for next year could be more, or less, than the 2019/2020 levels, depending upon Members' decisions and spending priorities, and following the impact of the 2020/2021 local government settlement.

- 11.3 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.
- 11.4 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 2020/2021 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 and service funding requirements. This is based on a Council Tax increase of 2.85%.

12.0 THE 2020/2021 GENERAL BUDGET STRATEGY CONSULTATION PROCESS

- 12.1 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.
- 12.2 The proposed approach to budget consultation for 2020/21 is set out in the Cabinet report dated 17th October 2019 and in the delegated decision of the Service Director for Democratic Services and Communication dated 14th November 2019. It comprises 2 phases as follows :
- Phase 1** - provided residents and stakeholders with the opportunity to feedback their views on some of the key strategic building blocks used to construct the Council's budget.
- Phase 2** - once Cabinet have agreed a draft budget strategy, and in light of the provisional local government settlement, then this draft strategy will itself be consulted upon as part of Phase 2.
- 12.3 The Phase 1 Consultation report has been available to support the preparation of these proposals, and is attached at Appendix 5.
- 12.4 The general budget consultation also incorporated the requirements to consult on discretions available locally for the Council Tax Reduction Scheme (which has been used to inform the Council's decision on its scheme for 2020/2021 as considered by Council on the 15th January 2020).
- 12.5 In addition, specific consultation activity was undertaken with the Finance & Performance Scrutiny Committee the minutes of which are attached at Appendix 6.

13.0 CONCLUSIONS

- 13.1 On the 16th December 2019, the Minister for Housing and Local Government (Julie James AM) announced the Provisional 2020/2021 Local Government Settlement which showed this Council's increase in resources was set at 4.5%.
- 13.2 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. Alongside this, there is 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 2020/2021.
- 13.3 This Council has continued to deliver year on year robust and balanced budgets alongside an investment programme supporting key priorities. The challenge remains however, 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 and uncertain financial climate.

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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 in writing, by fax or via e-mail (with the names of the Proposer and Seconder clearly stated) to the Proper Officer and signed by the Proposer not later than 5:00pm at least 8 clear working 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 Monitoring Officer and 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

2020/2021 BUDGET AND COUNCIL TAX SETTING TIMETABLE

16th December 2019

Consultation (Phase 1) – End of Budget Consultation Phase 1 (including Council Tax Reduction Scheme)

16th December 2019

Provisional Local Government Settlement - Receipt of provisional settlement figures

15th January 2020

Council Meeting – Report on the Implications of the Provisional Settlement

23rd January 2020

Cabinet Meeting – Consideration of draft Senior Leadership Team budget strategy options and for cabinet to formulate their draft budget strategy, taking into account feedback from Phase 1 of the Budget Consultation process

24th January 2020 to 7th February 2020

Consultation (Phase 2) – Consultation on the Cabinet's draft budget strategy

20th February 2020

Cabinet Meeting – To consider the feedback from the Phase 2 Consultation and to agree the Cabinet's final budget strategy for recommending to Council

25th February 2020

Final Local Government Settlement – Receipt of final settlement figures

4th March 2020

Council Meeting – Cabinet to submit its 2020/21 Budget Strategy and Council Tax levels to Council

Council Decision :

- Approve the 2020/21 Revenue Budget
- Approve the 2020/21 Council Tax (including necessary formal Council Tax Resolution)

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Our ref: MA/JJ/5755/19

To:
Leaders of County and County Borough Councils in Wales

Copied to:
Chief Executives and Directors of Finance, County and County Borough Councils in Wales
Chief Executive and Director of Finance, Welsh Local Government Association

16 December 2019

Dear Colleagues

Today I am announcing details of the Provisional Local Government Revenue and Capital Settlements for 2020-21 for county and county borough councils in Wales through a Cabinet Written Statement. This is attached for your information.

This announcement outlines my intention to set local government core revenue funding for 2020-21 at £4.474 billion. I am pleased this means, after adjusting for transfers, overall core funding for local government in 2020-21 will increase by 4.3 per cent on a like-for-like basis compared to the current year. While this does not mean austerity is over and there are, I know significant pressures, I hope that this significant increase can help you support and continue local critical and valued services.

Funding for schools has been a particular consideration of our budget discussions this year. Within this settlement, we have provided funding for additional costs arising from the UK Government's announced changes to employer pension contributions. We have also provided funding for additional costs arising from the 2019/20 teachers' pay deal for the remainder of the academic year and have provided funding beyond this to recognise the future impacts of teachers' pay awards which will come into effect from September 2020. We are also continuing to provide funding for our proposals for new eligibility criteria for free school meals, given the continued rollout of Universal Credit by the UK Government.

I have given careful consideration to the potential of including a funding floor for this settlement. Given that every authority will see an increase of at least 3% over 2019-20 on a like-for-like basis, I have concluded that a funding floor is not necessary in this particular instance. This will also enable us to reset the settlement base and fund authorities according to relative need, and not to make up for the implementation of historic floors.

Canolfan Cyswllt Cyntaf / First Point of Contact Centre:
0300 0604400

Bae Caerdydd • Cardiff Bay
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CF99 1NA

Gohebiaeth.Julie.James@llyw.cymru
Correspondence.Julie.James@gov.Wales

Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

The non-hypothecated general capital funding for 2020-21 will be £198 million (including £20 million for public highways refurbishment grant) - an increase of £15 million over that announced in the Final Budget last year. I hope that this additional funding will enable you to respond to the urgent need to decarbonise, in light of the climate emergency declared by the Welsh Government and many councils over the past year.

We have discussed, before, our shared recognition of the need to invest in the supply of housing. Investing in social housing should minimise the pressures on local authority budgets and on homelessness services. Investment in housing can also support the Welsh economy and local economies. I hope that this settlement, capital and revenue, can support you in increasing the scale and pace of housebuilding across Wales.

The draft *Local Government Finance Report* and additional tables containing details of the provisional settlement by individual authority are also being published on the Welsh Government website. These tables include the individual authority allocations of Aggregate External Finance (AEF), comprising Revenue Support Grant (RSG) and redistributed Non-Domestic Rates (NDR). As we have discussed through FSG, we are also providing information on revenue and capital grants which are planned for 2020-21. This information will be further updated for the final settlement.

The delay in the publication of the provisional settlement has enabled us to draw on the latest tax-base figures for 2020-21, meaning that there should be no change between provisional and final settlements as a result of updates to the tax base.

This settlement provides you with the most stable platform I can offer for planning your budgets for the forthcoming financial year. I fully appreciate the pressures local government is facing and am committed to shielding local government from the worst effects of austerity. This is a good settlement that should alleviate some of the pressures that you had been anticipating and offers an opportunity for local government to plan for the future. While I can't guarantee that there will be no changes between the provisional and final settlements, due to the financial uncertainty that comes with a new UK Government, I can assure you that I do not intend on making any significant changes to the methodology or the data underpinning the distribution of this settlement.

My announcement today launches a 7-week period of formal consultation on the provisional local government settlement for 2020-21. I would be grateful if you could ensure your response arrives no later than **Monday, 3 February 2020**. All responses to this consultation should be sent to:

Simon Edwards

Local Government Finance and Workforce Partnerships Division

Welsh Government, Cathays Park, Cardiff, CF10 3NQ.

Or email: LGFPSettlement@gov.wales.

Comments are invited about the effects (whether positive or adverse) the proposed settlement would have on opportunities for people to use the Welsh language and on treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language. In addition, we invite comments on whether the proposed settlement could be formulated or revised to have positive effects, or decreased adverse effects, on opportunities for people to use the Welsh language and on treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language.

The Welsh Government intends to publish a summary of the responses. Normally, the name and address (or part of the address) of each respondent are published along with the response. If you do not wish to be identified as the author of your response, please ensure you state this explicitly in your response.

Copies of responses may be placed in the Welsh Government's library. If you wish your comments to remain confidential, please make this clear in your reply. This will be considered in light of our obligations under the Freedom of Information Act. The Welsh Government will consider all responses received by the due date before the final determination is made and published.

Local authorities are reminded of the requirement to comply with the general equality duties set out in the Equality Act 2010, and also the specific equality duties where applicable. The equality impacts of budgetary options should be assessed and inform any final decisions.

Authorities also need to take account of your duties under the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the Welsh language standards in preparing plans for 2020-21.

This provisional settlement provides you with the information you need to plan your budgets for 2020-21 and to consider how best you engage with your local communities in formulating your proposals and making budget decisions.

Yours sincerely

Julie James AC/AM
Y Gweinidog Tai a Llywodraeth Leol
Minister for Housing and Local Government

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Welsh Local Government Revenue Settlement 2020-2021

Provisional

Table 1a: Change in Aggregate External Finance (AEF) plus floor funding, adjusted for transfers, by Unitary Authority

£'000s

Unitary Auth	2019-20 final Aggregate External Finance* plus floor funding	2020-21 provisional Aggregate External Finance	Percentage difference	Rank
Isle of Anglesey	97,324	101,005	3.8%	18
Gwynedd	179,375	187,579	4.6%	6
Conwy	156,064	161,398	3.4%	21
Denbighshire	145,713	151,932	4.3%	11
Flintshire	192,212	199,386	3.7%	19
Wrexham	178,121	184,296	3.5%	20
Powys	176,940	184,289	4.2%	14
Ceredigion	103,308	107,646	4.2%	13
Pembrokeshire	164,153	172,204	4.9%	3
Carmarthenshire	262,611	274,159	4.4%	10
Swansea	325,697	339,381	4.2%	12
Neath Port Talbot	217,091	226,762	4.5%	8
Bridgend	193,949	203,127	4.7%	5
The Vale of Glamorgan	153,453	161,021	4.9%	2
Rhondda Cynon Taf	372,105	388,666	4.5%	9
Merthyr Tydfil	92,332	96,810	4.8%	4
Caerphilly	272,212	283,367	4.1%	16
Blaenau Gwent	111,727	116,063	3.9%	17
Torfaen	134,373	140,467	4.5%	7
Monmouthshire	94,896	97,760	3.0%	22
Newport	216,443	228,077	5.4%	1
Cardiff	450,512	469,047	4.1%	15
Total unitary authorities	4,290,612	4,474,444	4.3%	

* The published AEF for 2019-20 final Aggregate External Finance is subject to a number of adjustments set out in Table 6

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AVAILABLE REVENUE RESOURCES 2020/21 AND PROPOSED USAGE

	£'000
Total resources available in 2020/2021	508,751
LESS: Total resources available in 2019/2020	483,469
<u>INCREASE</u> in resources available in 2020/2021	25,282

	£'000
Allocation of Resources	
Delegated Schools Budget	12,789
Education & Inclusion Services	424
Community & Children's Services	9,344
Prosperity, Development and Frontline Services	(896)
Chief Executive	780
Authority Wide Requirements	2,841
	25,282

PROPOSED REVENUE BUDGET 2020/21

Education & Inclusion Services

Delegated Schools Budgets

	£'000
Net Revenue Budget 2019/20	148,849
Increase	12,789
Proposed Net Revenue Budget 2020/21	161,638

Non Delegated Budgets

	£'000
Net Revenue Budget 2019/20	30,649
Base and Inflationary Pressures	1,125
General Efficiencies	(701)
Proposed Net Revenue Budget 2020/21	31,073

Total Net Revenue Budget 2020/21	192,711
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Community & Children's Services

	£'000
Net Revenue Budget 2019/20	153,264
Base and Inflationary Pressures	13,069
General Efficiencies	(2,675)
Other Cost Reduction Measures	(1,050)
Proposed Net Revenue Budget 2020/21	162,608

Prosperity, Development and Frontline Services

	£'000
Net Revenue Budget 2019/20	56,876
Base and Inflationary Pressures	1,922
General Efficiencies	(1,366)
Other Cost Reduction Measures	(1,452)
Proposed Net Revenue Budget 2020/21	55,980

Chief Executive

	£'000
Net Revenue Budget 2019/20	25,979
Base and Inflationary Pressures	2,077
General Efficiencies	(1,258)
Other Cost Reduction Measures	(39)
Proposed Net Revenue Budget 2020/21	26,759

Authority Wide

	£'000
Net Revenue Budget 2019/20	67,852
Increase	2,841
Proposed Net Revenue Budget 2020/21	70,693

Use of Reserves (Transition Funding)	-804
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Budget Consultation 2020/21 (Phase 1)

*Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough
Council*

January 2020



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

1. INTRODUCTION

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

2. BACKGROUND

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

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

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

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

3. METHODOLOGY

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

3.2 The following methods were used to consult with stakeholders;

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

3.3 The following engagement events took place during the consultation;

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

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



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

4 Questionnaire Results

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

Council Tax

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

Table 1: Council Tax preference

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

A selection of comments can be found below;

Agree to maintain services and increase Council Tax

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

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

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

“no more than 3% or 4%”

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

No increase in Council Tax

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

“Council tax is too high already”

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

Neither option

“protect services, but no council tax increase”

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

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

“Neither, too many services have already been cut”

Other

“Government needs to fund services better”

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

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

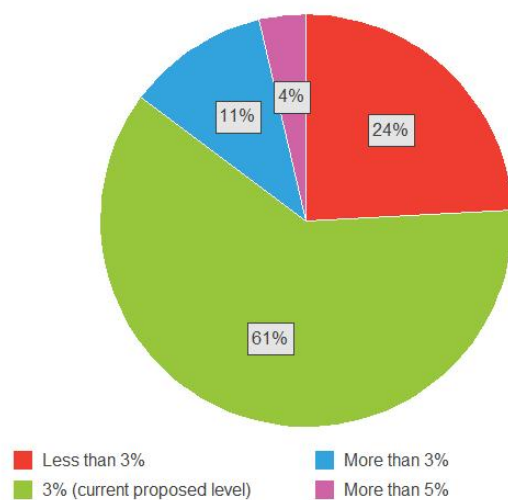


Figure 1 - Preferred level of Council Tax increase

Schools Budget

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

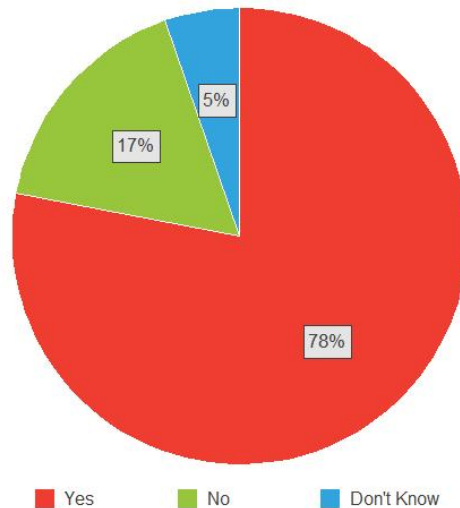


Figure 2 - Agreement with Schools Budget increase

Fees and Charges

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

Table 2: Areas to protect from increase

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

Parking Charges	298	35.9%	15.8%	48.3%
Cinema (entrance fee)	297	51.9%	24.9%	23.2%
Pontypridd Lido (entry for adult users)	298	47.3%	37.9%	14.8%
Meals on Wheels	297	31.3%	14.8%	53.9%
Adult Social Care Charges (non-residential care services)	299	41.1%	7.7%	51.2%
Bereavement Fees	299	38.1%	8.4%	53.5%

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

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

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

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

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

4.7 A selection of comments are provided below;

Overall

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

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

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

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

School Meals

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

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

“school meals are often the only meal”

Leisure

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

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

Parking Charges

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

Cinema

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

Pontypridd Lido

“entrance fees for Lido are too low”

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

Adult Social Care Charges

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

“I believe no further increases for vulnerable elderly adults”

Bereavement Fees

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

Other

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

Council Services

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

Table 3: Council services to be protected and prioritised

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

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

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

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

Efficiencies

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

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

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

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

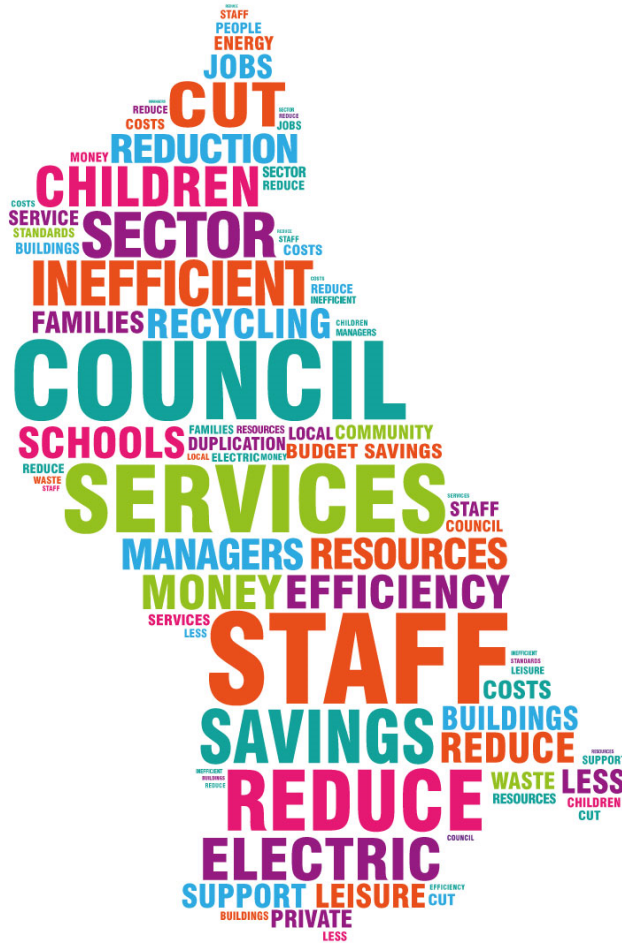


Figure 3 – Efficiency comments

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

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

Energy Efficiency

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

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

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

Senior managers and Councillors

“too many managers and with too high salaries”

“too many high earners within the Council”

Buildings

“reduce number of council buildings”

“more energy efficient buildings”

“reduce the number of Council buildings across RCT”

“reduction in real estate”

Enforcement

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

Digitalisation/Agile working

“more agile work, less building and travel”

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

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

“home working to reduce council offices”

“do more online”

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

Difficult for more Efficiency

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

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

Income generation

“look at ways of increasing income”

“Income generation –advertising”

Other

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

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

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

Efficiency

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

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

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

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

Staff/Employment

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

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

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

Social Care

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

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

Schools

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

“More money for schools and social care”

Positive

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

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

“The public events are helpful to understand things better”

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

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

Other

“More investment in regeneration projects”

“Lobby for more funding”

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

“Look at ways to generate more income”

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

The Council's Priorities

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

- **Digitalisation** – taking the opportunity new technology provides to deliver better services for residents, visitors, businesses and how we operate internally
- **Commercialisation** – utilising our scale and expertise to deliver services for other organisations and customers and thereby generate income
- **Early Intervention and Prevention** – investing in preventative services to deliver savings in the medium term.
- **Independence** – reshaping our services for vulnerable residents to ensure that we promote independence and deliver first class care services.

- **Efficient and Effective Organisation** – challenging our ongoing service delivery and driving out further efficiencies through for example, a reduction in administration costs and reducing property costs linked to new ways of working, for example through agile working.

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

Table 4: Key areas of focus

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

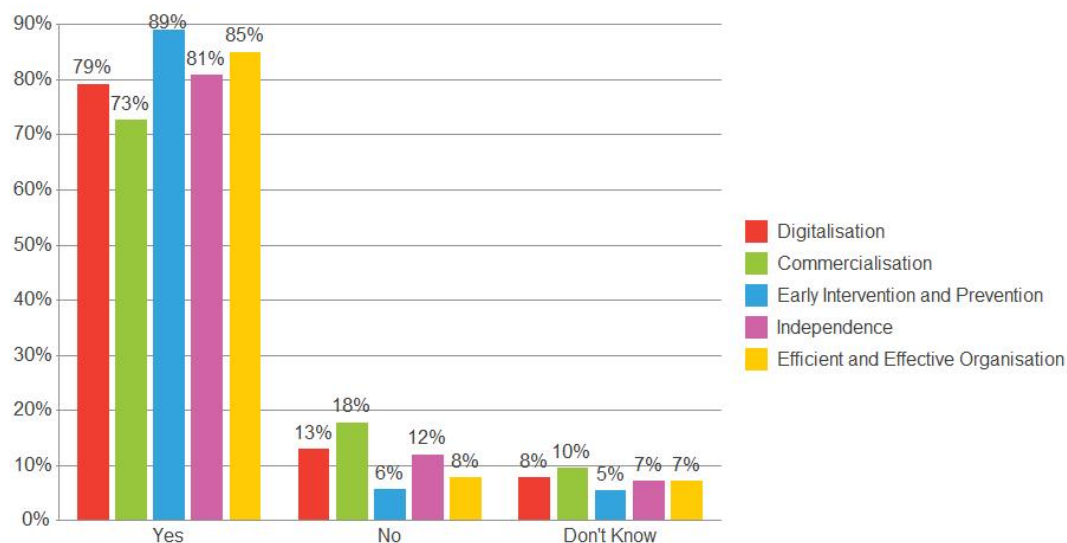


Figure 4 - Agreement with focus on 5 key areas

Council Investment Opportunities

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

Table 5: Areas of Investment

Analysis % Respondents			
	Yes	No	Don't Know
21st Century Schools (new and remodelled schools)	72.5%	18.0%	9.5%
Roads & Transport (repairs and resurfacing and major projects such as A4119 dualling, Llanharan bypass and Mountain Ash Cross Valley link)	80.3%	15.2%	4.5%
Recycling & the Environment (improving recycling performance)	76.5%	19.7%	3.8%
Town Centres & Regeneration (improving the town centres eg. Llys Cadwyn, Pontypridd)	71.6%	22.9%	5.5%
Empty Properties (Grant to bring properties back into use)	76.0%	18.1%	5.9%
Leisure (improvements to facilities)	54.3%	36.4%	9.3%
Play Areas and Parks (upgrading the equipment and standard)	68.2%	25.4%	6.4%
Extra Care/Community Hubs (focus on independence for older people)	83.9%	10.6%	5.5%
Employment (apprenticeships and graduate placements)	74.4%	18.4%	7.2%
Events/Arts (investment in attractions and theatres)	47.9%	41.2%	10.9%
Flood Alleviation (investing in flood prevention schemes)	70.2%	21.1%	8.7%

- 4.18 The word cloud/map below provides a simple illustrated snapshot of some of the main investment comments received.



Figure 5 – Investment comments

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

21st Century Schools

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

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

Roads & Transport

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

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

Recycling & the Environment

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

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

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

Town Centres & Regeneration

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

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

Empty Properties

"Tackling empty buildings needs to be considered"

"Maybe incentives for empty shops and 'start up' businesses"

Leisure

"playing field improvements and 3g usage over weekends"

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

Extra Care/Community Hubs

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

Employment

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

“more apprenticeships and work experience opportunities”

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

Events/Arts

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

Flood Alleviation

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

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

Other

“Good to see so much investment in RCT”

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

“Would like to see more money in youth services”

Council Reserves

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

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

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

5. ENGAGEMENT EVENTS

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

Council Investment Areas

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

Table 6: Engagement exercise priorities

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

A selection of the comments received are shown below;

21st Century Schools

"Schools is most important to me"

"Schools always need money."

"Schools / education is really important."

Roads & Transport

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

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

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

"Roads always need improving"

Recycling & the Environment

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

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

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

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

"Recycling is good here!"

"Pretty good recycling"

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

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

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

"Recycling - this is important"

"Keeping streets clean will help with flooding"

Town Centres & Regeneration

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

"Towns & Regeneration - Aberdare needs shops"

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

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

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

"Treorchy good town centre"

"Aberdare needs more done"

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

Empty Properties

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Leisure

"Leisure has too much funding already"

"Leisure is really important to help keep people healthy"

Play Areas and Parks

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

"Parks important especially for young people"

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

"Play areas very important for the children"

Extra Care/Community Hubs

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

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

"Extra care should stay local"

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

"Extra care is important for me as I get older"

Employment

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

"All for apprenticeships"

"Employment - having 2 grandchildren, this is important."

Events/Arts

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

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

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

Other

“money should be spent on libraries”

“Community libraries in smaller areas need money.”

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

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

“Homelessness + housing support is currently inadequate”

Older Person Advisory Group (OPAG)

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

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

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

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

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

“Not getting council tax from empty properties.”

- 5.7 Views on the School Budget included;

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

“Some buildings need refurbishing”

“Encourage teachers to come in from other areas”

- 5.8 A number of Fees and Charges were discussed;

School meals

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

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

Leisure;

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

Sports clubs

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

Lido

"Not expensive for swimming."

5.9 Protect and Prioritise

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

"Schools and libraries are a priority."

"Youth provision".

5.10 Efficiencies

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

"Can contribute to isolation."

5.11 Council's Priorities

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

"Invest in all of them."

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

Disability Forum

- 5.12 An engagement session was held with the Rhondda Cynon Taf Disability Forum where a presentation was given and a general discussion held

around the questions in the online questionnaire. A selection of the comments are shown below.

5.13 Council Tax

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

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

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

“% increase will depend on pensions and allowances”.

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

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

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

5.14 Schools Budget

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

“What are the pension costs?”

“What happens to Special Needs Schools?”

5.15 Fees and Charges

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

“Freeze school meals”

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

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

Council Service Priorities

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

5.16 Efficiencies

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

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

“Feedback on the consultation important.”

5.17 Investments

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

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

“Cycle routes important to reduce congestion.”

6. YOUNG PERSON ENGAGEMENT

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

6.2 **Feedback**

The following section outlines some of the feedback received.

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

Table 7: Youth engagement priorities

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

- 6.4 As can be seen in the table above, the investment opportunities receiving the majority of money were recycling & environment, employment and towns and regeneration.
- 6.5 Following this exercise, the young people took part in a discussion with the consultation officers present asking what their priorities were, which boxes they had put their money in and why? A selection of the comments can be found below:

What is your priority?

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

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

“£50 in flood alleviation.”

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

“£300 in transport and roads”

“£150 in unemployment”

“£50 on environment as we need more bins”

“£500 on town centres.”

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

“£150 on parks for youth.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

Other

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

“Travel.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

7. Social Media Feedback

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

7.2 The following results were received;

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

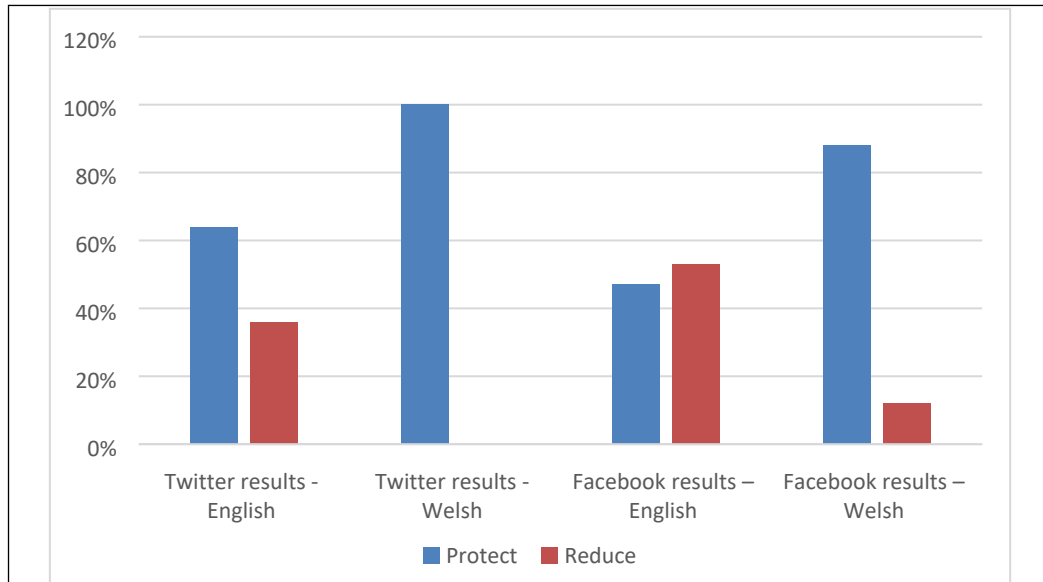


Figure 6 – Social media poll 1 results

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

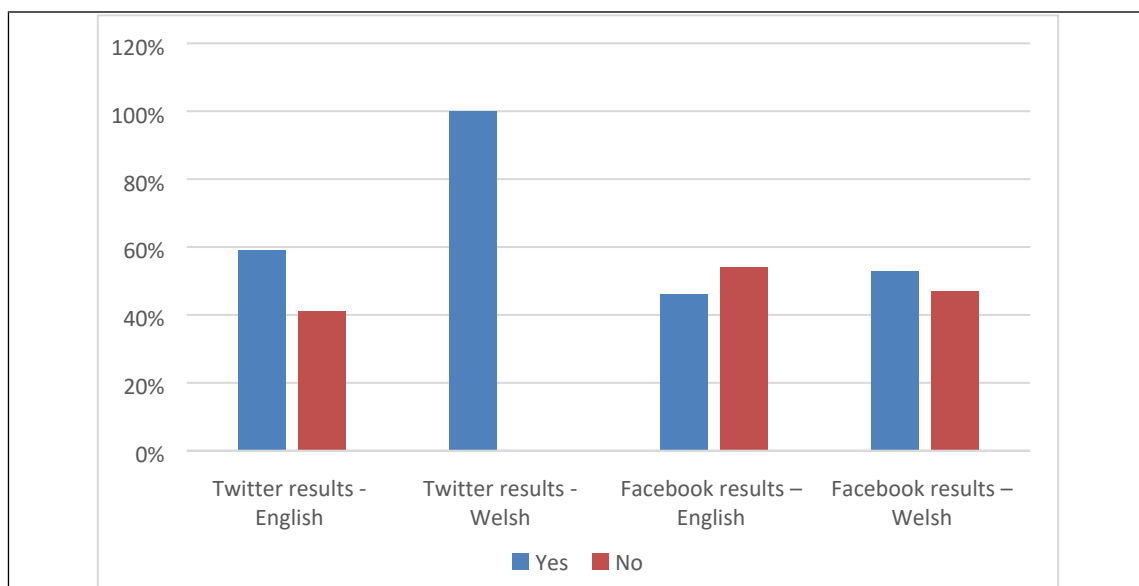


Figure 7 – Social media poll 2 results

PHASE 1 BUDGET CONSULTATION (2020/21) - PRE-SCRUTINY OUTCOMES

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNCIL FINANCE AND PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting of the Finance and Performance Scrutiny Committee held on Monday, 16 December 2019 at 5.00 pm at the Council Chambers, The Pavilions, Cambrian Park. Clydach Vale, Tonypandy, CF40 2XX.

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

Councillor G Thomas Councillor S Bradwick
Councillor R Yeo Councillor J Williams
Councillor J Cullwick Councillor G Caple

Officers in attendance:-

Mr P Griffiths, Service Director – Finance & Improvement Services
Mr A Wilkins, Director of Legal Services
Mr S Gale, Director of Prosperity & Development
Mr T Jones, Service Director – ICT & Digital Services

County Borough Councillors in attendance:-

Councillor M Adams, Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Councillor R Bevan, Cabinet Member for Enterprise Development & Housing

Others:-

Mr J. Fish, Voting Elected Parent / Governor Representative

30 Welcome

The Vice Chair welcomed Members to the meeting of the Finance and Performance Scrutiny Committee and thanked everyone for attending.

31 Declaration of Interest

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

32 Apologies

Apologies of absence were received from County Borough Councillors M. Powell, M. Diamond, A. Davies-Jones, G. Holmes, W. Lewis, S. Rees-Owen, A. Fox and T. Williams.

33 Minutes

It was **RESOLVED** to approve the minutes of the 4th of November 2019 as an accurate reflection of the meeting, subject to the following amendments:-

- Item 24, page 7 to be amended as follows; “Councillor Thomas commented that the greater proportion of areas in the Cynon Valley are not being charged CIL”.

Extract from Minutes

With the aid of a PowerPoint presentation, the Service Director – Finance & Improvement Services provided Members with an overview of the 2020/21 Revenue Budget Strategy Consultation and updated Committee on the following areas:

- Approach for 2020/21
- Consultation
 - Council Budget 2020/21
 - The Council's Priorities
 - Council Tax Reduction Scheme
 - Draft Corporate Plan 2020 – 24
- Budget Setting Timetable

Following the update, the Service Director 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 2020/21 Revenue Budget Strategy Consultation process. The Service 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 2020/21.

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

With regard to Question 1 on Council Tax, Members supported a less than 3% increase to help support the continuation of service provision in the context of rising cost pressures and demand for specific services. Members also commented that in setting the level of Council Tax for 2020/21 regard should be given to the level of funding the Council is anticipated to receive via the local government settlement from Welsh Government.

In respect of Question 2 on Schools Budget, Committee Members agreed that the Council should provide sufficient resources to fully cover increased pay costs in schools throughout RCT. However, a member of the Committee highlighted that other cost pressures, over and above pay costs, should also be fully funded. An elected Member fed back that the same question should also be included as part of the consultation process for Community and Children's Services and not just in respect of schools.

For question 3 covering fees and charges, the following points were fed back:

- A number of Members considered that school meal prices should be frozen and all other areas should be increased by 1.5%, and highlighted their continued support for the promotion of free school meals;
- A Member cautioned against increasing the charges for Town Centre Car Parking and it was fed back that there should be no increase to the cost of a resident car parking permit;
- A Member cautioned against increasing the fees for Meals on Wheels and noted that the Council needs to encourage more residents to use this service;
- A Member felt that the Council should consider increasing the level of charges for tourist attractions as charges seem to be lower in comparison to other areas of Wales; and
- A number of Members considered that charges for the bulky waste collection service and pest control service should be frozen.

Following Member feedback, the Service Director provided further information on specific areas. In respect free school meals, the Service Director informed Members that transitional / protection arrangements have come into force across Wales in 2019 that mean all eligible children entitled to free school meals will retain their entitlement for a set period even if their circumstances change and no longer meet the eligibility criteria. Members indicated that they were not aware of these changes and requested further information. In respect of car parking charges, the Service Director fed back that charges are only applied in Aberdare and Pontypridd Town Centres, with different charges for short and long stay, and have been frozen for a number of years.

With regard to Question 4, Council Service priorities, Committee Members agreed that all Council services are essential and should be protected as part of the 2020/21 budget setting process.

For Question 5, delivery of efficiencies, Members agreed that setting a Council wide efficiency saving target was a good approach and that managers should be supported to deliver even more efficient services, where possible. However, Members considered that the year-on-year delivery of efficiency savings is becoming more difficult to achieve without impacting on frontline services and highlighted the importance of protecting staff as part of any future budget savings proposals. A Member also highlighted that exploiting more digital working could provide opportunities for the Council to deliver better and more efficient services.

At this point, the Service Director asked Members if there was any other general comments they would like to provide on the Council's budget, as part of Question 6. Members noted that they had no further points to feedback at this point and requested the Service Director to continue with the presentation.

Discussions continued in respect of the Council's priorities for the 2020/21 budget setting process. Members were informed that the Council focuses on five key areas to maximise resources and deliver improved services (i.e. Digitalisation; Commercialisation; Early Intervention and Prevention; Independence; and Efficient and Effective Organisation). Members were asked whether the Council should continue to focus on these areas and Members were supportive of this strategy going forward.

In respect of investment opportunities, Members were asked whether the Council should continue to invest in the priority areas listed. An elected Member raised concerns in respect of improving recycling performance and noted that Social Landlords are not engaging with the local authority. The Member emphasised that Social Landlords need to work with the Council in order to improve recycling rates across the County Borough.

A member of the Committee sought clarification in respect of the Council's investment in flood prevention schemes and sought clarity on the extent of involvement of National Resources Wales. It was noted that the flood alleviation schemes referred to are primarily Council funded projects and the Council will engage with Natural Resources Wales, as deemed appropriate, on a scheme by scheme basis.

In respect of Council reserves, Members were informed that the Council has used one off reserves (£1.1M for 2019/20) to balance its budget alongside delivering savings early in subsequent years to replenish these reserves. The Service Director added that this approach is part of a medium term financial strategy recognising that managing and balancing the revenue budget is not a one-off annual process. Members were asked whether the Council should continue with this strategy and Members agreed on the use of this strategy going forward.

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?
 - Members agreed that 4 weeks is a reasonable period to continue paying Council Tax Reduction when someone returns to work.
- 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?
 - Members were supportive of these elements continuing to be excluded.
- Do you think that 6 months is a reasonable period to backdate claims for working age and pensioners?
 - Members fed back their agreement that 6 months is reasonable.

Discussions ensued in respect of the Council's Draft Corporate Plan 2020-24. Members were informed that three priorities are being proposed (People, Place and Prosperity) and Members were provided with the opportunity to provide their views on these priorities and ideas about anything else that would make a difference to the people and communities of Rhondda Cynon Taf. Committee Members confirmed their agreement with the proposed priorities as set out in the draft Corporate Plan 2020-24.

In conclusion, the Service Director – Finance & Improvement Services informed Members that the Committee's feedback will be considered by Cabinet as part of it agreeing a draft Revenue Budget Strategy for 2020/21 and that the Finance and Performance Scrutiny Committee will have opportunity to further scrutinise and comment upon the 2020/21 draft Revenue Budget Strategy at its January 2020 meeting.

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

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