



**CYNGOR BWRDEISTREF SIROL**  
**RHONDDA CYNON TAF**  
**COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**A virtual meeting of the CABINET will be held on  
Wednesday, 21st February, 2024 at 1.00 pm**

**Contact: Emma Wilkins - Council Business Unit (Tel No. 07385406118)**

**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 Monday, 19 February 2024 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](mailto:ExecutiveandRegulatoryBusinessUnit@rctcbc.gov.uk)**

It is the intention to live stream this meeting, details of which can be accessed [here](#)

**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 24<sup>th</sup> January 2024 as an accurate record.

## **INFORMATION REPORT**

### **3. PRE-SCRUTINY FEEDBACK**

To receive the report of the Service Director, Democratic Services and Communication providing the feedback and comments of the items that were pre-scrutinised by the Council's thematic Scrutiny Committee's following its last Committee cycle.

(Pages 13 - 18)

## **OFFICER REPORTS**

### **4. THE COUNCIL'S 2024/25 REVENUE BUDGET**

To receive the report of the Deputy Chief Executive and Group Director of Finance, Digital and Frontline Services, which provides Cabinet with the opportunity to amend as necessary the draft budget strategy which they would wish to recommend to Council.

(Pages 19 - 86)

### **5. THE COUNCIL'S CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2024/25 - 2026/27**

To receive the report of the Deputy Chief Executive and Group Director of Finance, Digital and Frontline Services, which provides Cabinet with a proposed three year capital programme for 2024/25 to 2026/27 that if acceptable, will be presented to Council for approval.

(Pages 87 - 112)

### **6. NON-DOMESTIC RATE (NDR) RELIEF SCHEMES 2024/25**

To receive the report of the Deputy Chief Executive and Group Director of Finance, Digital and Frontline Services, which provides Cabinet with details of the Welsh Government Non-Domestic Rates (NDR) – Retail, Leisure and Hospitality Rate Relief (RLH) Scheme for 2024/25; details of the Council's local business rate reduction scheme; and details of new Non-Domestic Rate reliefs available to qualifying business rate payers from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2024.

(Pages 113 - 122)

### **7. REGULATION OF INVESTIGATORY POWERS ACT 2000 (RIPA) AND INVESTIGATORY POWERS ACT 2016 (IPA): USE OF INVESTIGATORY POWERS DURING 2023 BY RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

To receive the report of the Director of Legal and Democratic Services, which enables Members to review the Council's use of the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 (as amended) (RIPA) for the period 1<sup>st</sup> January to 31<sup>st</sup> December 2023; and the Council's use of the Acquisition of Communications Data under the Investigatory Powers Act 2016 (IPA) for the same period.

(Pages 123 - 130)

8. **THE COUNCIL'S CORPORATE SAFEGUARDING POLICY**

To receive the report of the Chief Executive, which seeks Cabinet approval of the revised Corporate Safeguarding Policy.

(Pages 131 - 162)

9. **URGENT BUSINESS**

To consider any urgent business as the Chairman feels appropriate.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A. Stanger', is written over a faint, illegible stamp or watermark.

**Service Director of Democratic Services & Communication**

**Circulation:-**

**Councillors:** Councillor A Morgan (Chair)  
Councillor M Webber (Deputy Chair)  
Councillor G Caple  
Councillor A Crimmings  
Councillor R Lewis  
Councillor C Leyshon  
Councillor M Norris  
Councillor B Harris

**Officers:** Paul Mee, Chief Executive  
Barrie Davies, Deputy Chief Executive and Group Director of Finance, Digital and Frontline Services  
Andy Wilkins, Director of Legal Services and Democratic Services  
David Powell, Director of Corporate Estates  
Gaynor Davies, Director of Education and Inclusion Services  
Louise Davies, Director of Public Health, Protection and Community Services  
Richard Evans, Director of Human Resources  
Simon Gale, Director of Prosperity & Development  
Stephen Williams, Director for Highways, Streetcare and Transportation Services  
Christian Hanagan, Service Director of Democratic Services & Communication  
Paul Griffiths, Service Director – Finance & Improvement Services  
Derek James, Service Director – Prosperity & Development  
Neil Elliott, Director of Social Services

*Mae'r ddogfen hon ar gael yn Gymraeg / This document is also available in Welsh*



**RHONDDA CYNON TAF**

**RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNCIL**

## **CABINET**

Minutes of the virtual meeting of the Cabinet held on Wednesday, 24 January 2024 at 2.00 pm.

This meeting was live streamed, details of which can be accessed [here](#)

### **County Borough Councillors – The following Councillors were present:**

Councillor A Morgan (Chair)

Councillor M Webber    Councillor A Crimmings  
Councillor R Lewis    Councillor C Leyshon  
Councillor M Norris    Councillor B Harris

### **Officers in attendance**

Mr P Mee, Chief Executive  
Mr B Davies, Deputy Chief Executive and Group Director of Finance, Digital and Frontline Services  
Mr A Wilkins, Director of Legal Services and Democratic Services  
Mr D Powell, Director of Corporate Estates  
Ms G Davies, Director of Education and Inclusion Services  
Ms L Davies, Director of Public Health, Protection and Community Services  
Mr R Evans, Director of Human Resources  
Mr S Gale, Director of Prosperity & Development  
Mr S Williams, Director for Highways, Streetcare and Transportation Services  
Mr C Hanagan, Service Director of Democratic Services & Communication  
Mr P Griffiths, Service Director – Finance & Improvement Services  
Mr N Elliott, Director of Social Services  
Ms L Howell, 21st Century School Organisation and Business Manager  
Ms L Kidner, Business Manager, Catering

## **95 Welcome and Apology**

The Leader welcomed attendees to the Cabinet meeting and an apology for absence was received from the Cabinet Member for Health and Social Care.

## **96 Declaration of Interest**

In accordance with the Code of Conduct, the following personal declarations were made in respect of Item 8 of the agenda - Review of the Welsh Church Act Fund:

- Leader - "A number of organisations I'm involved with have benefited from the Fund";
- Deputy Leader – "The group I chair has been a recipient of the Fund";
- Cabinet Member for Environment & Leisure - "A group I am involved with is a recipient of the Fund";
- Cabinet Member for Development and Prosperity - "A group I am involved with is a recipient of the Fund"; and
- Cabinet Member for Education, Youth Participation & Welsh Language -

"I am a Governor at YGG Abercynon".

**97 Minutes**

The Cabinet **RESOLVED** to approve the minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 18<sup>th</sup> December 2023.

**98 Pre-Scrutiny Committee Feedback**

For information, the Service Director of Democratic Services and Communication provided Cabinet with the feedback and comments of the items that were pre-scrutinised by the Council's thematic Scrutiny Committee's following its last Committee cycle.

The Cabinet **RESOLVED**:

1. To note the comments and observations of the Scrutiny Committees following pre-scrutiny of the items listed within section 5 of the report.

**99 Continuation of free Breakfast Club provision in Primary and Special Schools with the introduction of a charge for the additional childcare element**

The Director of Education and Inclusion Services advised Cabinet on the outcome of the recent consultation in respect of a proposal to introduce a charge for the additional childcare element, which is available prior to the commencement of free breakfast club provision in primary and special schools in Rhondda Cynon Taf, noting eligible Free School Meal (eFSM) pupils would be exempt from any charge.

The Cabinet Member for Education, Youth Participation and Welsh Language thanked the officers for the report and thanked the respondents to the consultation.

The Cabinet Member recognised that the Cabinet were considering the proposal because of the significant financial challenges faced by the Council. The Cabinet Member noted that the proposals before the Committee would maintain access to a free breakfast for all pupils; and that any additional income to be generated would be ring fenced and reinvested back into school budgets as part of the Council's proposed 2024/25 Revenue Budget Strategy.

The Cabinet Member was pleased to note that eFSM pupils would be exempt from the proposed charge and emphasised that the most vulnerable in the community would be protected if Cabinet were to agree to the recommendations. The Cabinet Member also welcomed the recommendation in response to the consultation to agree a further category of concession whereby parents/carers would only pay for the first two children of primary age, living in the same household, accessing the provision.

In respect of the consultation responses, the Cabinet Member noted the strong feedback in respect of many parents/carers' circumstances, whereby they may wish to access the childcare element, pre-the school day, for part of the working week only. The Cabinet Member questioned if it would be feasible to introduce a second option as part of the proposal, which would be a second charge for up to three days only. The Cabinet Member sought advice from the Director and if feasible, stated that he would be minded to propose an addition is made to

recommendation 2.2, subject to comments of other Cabinet Members. The Director echoed the Cabinet Member's comment that this was an emerging theme from the consultation responses and advised that the suggestion could be explored if Members were in agreement.

The Deputy Leader took the opportunity to thank the Overview & Scrutiny Committee for its comments and feedback in respect of the proposals. In terms of the consultation, the Deputy Leader recognised the concerns expressed by parents through the consultation process, in respect of the additional financial cost that the proposal would introduce. The Deputy Leader explained that this was an area of support provided above what was originally intended, when free school breakfasts were introduced, and an area where a charge is already applied by a number of Local Authorities. It was noted that other Local Authorities, due to the decrease in Public Sector funding, were also currently consulting upon such proposals. The Deputy Leader was of the view that in comparison to the charges for child care, the cost proposed was reasonable.

The Cabinet Member for Environment and Leisure acknowledged the difficult decision faced by the Cabinet but stated that it was necessary in the current financial circumstances. The Cabinet Member questioned how the Council would ensure consistency as part of any implementation and access to the same level, or time, or childcare for the £1 charge.

The Director advised that officers would work with schools and partners due to the variations within the current breakfast clubs offer, in terms of the start and finish times. The Director recognised that, if approved by Cabinet, the offer would need to be equitable across the system.

The Leader commented that the consultation had demonstrated that the price cap for the first two children of primary age, living in the same household, accessing the provision, was the correct way forward. Similarly, the Leader noted that those eligible for FSM under the old criteria would be exempt from the charge was also welcomed in the consultation.

In terms of the amendment to recommendation 2.2 as proposed by the Cabinet Member for Education, Youth Participation and Welsh Language, the Leader was in support of a two-tiered charging system and suggested an option for parents/carers to access the provision for up to three days per week only at a term time fee of £40. The Leader acknowledged that it would be too difficult to offer a daily charge but felt the two-tiered approach would be fairer in response to the consultation feedback.

Members were content with the amendment to recommendation 2.2 of the report and the Service Director of Democratic Services and Communication confirmed the following wording:

- ***2.2 - To the preferred fee of £1 per day, rounded down to £60 per term, for the additional childcare element, which is available prior to the commencement of free breakfast club provision, to be implemented from the start of the spring term 2024 or as soon as is practicable thereafter; and to confirm the ability to access this provision for up to three days per week only, at a term time fee of £40.***

The Cabinet **RESOLVED**:

1. To note the information contained within the attached Consultation Report, which includes feedback received from the online surveys,

emails and letters, the minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 13<sup>th</sup> December 2023 and the frequently asked questions posted on the Council's website;

2. To the preferred fee of £1 per day, rounded down to £60 per term, for the additional childcare element, which is available prior to the commencement of free breakfast club provision, to be implemented from the start of the spring term 2024 or as soon as is practicable thereafter; and to confirm the ability to access this provision for up to three days per week only, at a term time fee of £40;
3. That eFSM pupils should be exempt from the proposed charge and agree a further category of concession whereby parents/carers would only pay for the first two children of primary age, living in the same household, accessing the provision;
4. That the additional income to be generated is ring fenced and reinvested back into school budgets as part of the Council's proposed 2024/25 Revenue Budget Strategy; and
5. To delegate authority to the Director of Education and Inclusion Services to undertake and conclude the necessary actions to implement the decision of Cabinet.

#### **100 Proposal to develop a new Special School in Rhondda Cynon Taf**

The Director of Education and Inclusion Services advised Members of the outcome of the recent publication of a Statutory Notice in respect of the proposal to open a new 3 to 19 special school in Rhondda Cynon Taf (RCT) and introduce catchment areas for all 3 to 19 special schools across RCT.

The Cabinet Member for Education, Youth Participation and Welsh Language was pleased to note that there were no objections to the proposed new 3 to 19 special school and the introduction of catchment areas for all 3 to 19 special schools across RCT.

The Cabinet Member acknowledged the acute pressures faced by the Local Authority with regard to special school placements and welcomed the proposals before Members. The Cabinet Member concluded by stating that he looked forward to receiving a future Treasury Management report to the Council and the outcome of the bid for Welsh Government funding.

The Deputy Leader echoed the Cabinet Member's comments and welcomed the next steps in the process.

The Cabinet **RESOLVED:**

1. To note that no objections or comments were received in response to the publication of the Statutory Notice to progress the proposal;
2. To implement the proposal with no amendments; and
3. That an update to the Council's borrowing envelope is included in a future Treasury Management report to Council when costs are known and Welsh Government funding is secured.

#### **101 Council Fees and Charges Proposals 2024-2025**



The Service Director of Finance and Improvement Services set out:

- The proposed revisions to Council fees and charges levels for the 2024/25 financial year to be consulted on as part of phase 2 of the 2024/25 budget consultation process (with the proposed revisions to be effective from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2024 or as soon as is practicable thereafter);
- Details of fees and charges decisions previously approved and to be included in the 2024/25 proposed Budget Strategy; and
- A proposed update to the Council's Street Trade License Scheme and proposed arrangements around the implementation of future changes to the maximum level of weekly charge for non-residential care services, as determined by Welsh Government.

The Leader thanked the Service Director for the report and commented that the proposed fees and charges detailed before the Committee were relatively fair. The Leader explained that in some areas, they had sought to ensure the full cost was not passed on. As an example, the Leader noted that the approximate 14% general increase in food costs would see the current cost of school dinners increase by around 30-35p, but the proposed increase was 15p. In respect of car parking costs, the Leader advised that there had been lobbying from the public for the Council to introduce card payments, but in order to balance the cost of the new offer, a small increase of 10p had been proposed. In relation the proposed 25p Lido booking fee, the Leader advised that with each booking, there is a transactional fee for the Council but when thousands of individuals book and fail to attend, the Council were incurring a charge. The Leader advised that the 25p fee would offset the charge going forward.

The Cabinet Member for Climate Change and Corporate Services was pleased to note that 82.3% of respondents to phase one of the consultation were in agreement with the approach the Council takes to introducing fees. The Cabinet Member was pleased with the balanced approach to fees and charges, which she was of the view, took into consideration the financial situation of residents.

The Cabinet **RESOLVED:**

1. To consider proposed revisions to Council fees and charges for the 2024/25 financial year along with new proposed charges;
2. For the fees and charges proposals (as set out at paragraphs 5.3.1 to 5.3.21 of the report) to be consulted on through phase 2 of the Council's 2024/25 Budget Consultation process and reported back to Cabinet for consideration as part of formulating a recommended Budget Strategy for 2024/25;
3. To note the fees and charges decisions previously approved and to be included in the 2024/25 proposed Budget Strategy (paragraph 5.10 / Table 2 of the report);
4. To note the proposed update to the Council's Street Trade License Scheme to be considered by the Council's Licensing Committee on 30<sup>th</sup> January 2024 and, subject to the Committee's approval, for the estimated additional income generated to be incorporated within the Council's proposed 2024/25 Revenue Budget Strategy; and
5. To note Welsh Government's responsibility in setting the maximum level of weekly charge for non-residential care services and approve that future revisions to maximum weekly charge levels are implemented by the Council in line with Welsh Government guidance.

**102 Change to the Agenda order**

The Leader agreed to change the order of the agenda due to a technical issue.

**103 Review of the Welsh Church Act Fund**

The Director of Prosperity and Development sought approval to amend the criteria and financial thresholds of the Welsh Church Act Fund in order to ensure a greater positive impact for local communities and maximise take up of the Fund.

The Cabinet Member for Development and Prosperity spoke positive of the content of the report and of having the opportunity to revise the current threshold. The Cabinet Member acknowledged that the fund already provided support to many local community groups and was of the view that the proposals would build upon that support, by making it more flexible.

The Cabinet **RESOLVED:**

1. To the revised criteria outlined in paragraphs 7.2 – 7.4 of the report for formal consultation with Bridgend and Merthyr Councils; and
2. That subject to no objections from Bridgend and Merthyr Councils, the new arrangements are implemented.

**104 The Council's 2024-2025 Revenue Budget**

The Deputy Chief Executive and Group Director of Finance, Digital and Frontline Services provided Cabinet with information in respect of the 2024/25 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 2024/25, which it will recommend to Council, for approval.

The Leader thanked the Group Director for the report and admitted that the budget round has been the most difficult since he had been Council Leader in terms of pressures on services, high utility costs and cost of living pressures. The Leader felt that the budget proposed to Members was reasonable given the aforementioned difficulties faced by both the Council and households. It was noted that all statutory services had been maintained, and in many cases, well above the provision.

Whilst acknowledging that a rise in council tax was not ideal, the Leader was of the view that the proposal was reasonable in order to maintain valuable social care and education provision within the Borough.

The Cabinet Member for Climate Change and Corporate Services echoed the Leader's comments and felt that the consultation had highlighted that the majority of the public recognised the financial pressures placed upon the Council.

The Deputy Leader took the opportunity to thank the consultation respondents and noted that 75.6% agreed to protecting services at current levels with a reasonable increase in council tax. The Deputy Leader also noted the proposed council tax increase would still make RCT one of the lowest in Wales.

The Cabinet **RESOLVED:**

1. To 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. To note and consider the outcomes of the budget consultation phase 1 process;
3. To review and consider the draft 2024/25 Revenue Budget Strategy;
4. To consider and determine the level of Council Tax increase for 2024/25 which it would wish to build into the strategy to form the basis upon which a second phase of consultation will take place;
5. The draft timetable for setting the 2024/25 revenue budget as set out at Appendix A2 of the report;
6. To receive feedback from the second phase of budget consultation in order to consider and determine the final budget strategy for submission to Council; and
7. 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.

#### **105 The adoption of the Authority’s revised Local Flood Risk Management Strategy and Action Plan**

The Head of Flood Risk Management and Strategic Projects advised members on the outcome of the statutory public consultation on the revised Local Flood Risk Management Strategy (LFRMS) and Action Plan (formerly known as a Flood Risk Management Plan), as required under Section 10 of the Flood and Water Management Act (FWMA) 2010.

The Leader acknowledged that a huge amount of work had been put into developing the revised strategy and action plan. The Leader commended the detailed plan and advised that it would put the Local Authority in a good position going forward with regards to future bids and capital funding from Welsh Government. However, the Leader explained that the plan clearly demonstrated that RCT is at the highest risk of surface flooding in Wales and as such, there was a need to continue to invest in flood resilience and to work with households and businesses.

The Director of Highways, Streetcare and Transportation Services wished to place on record his thanks to the team for the work undertaken in producing the documents before Members. The Director commented that he felt the investment had started to pay dividends and that the team were undertaking a risk based approach.

The Deputy Leader took the opportunity to thank the Service Director of Democratic Services and Communication for the [letter to Cabinet](#), which outlined the comments of the Council’s Climate Change, Frontline Services and Prosperity Scrutiny Committee following consideration of the Authority’s Revised Local Flood Risk Management Strategy and Action Plan at its meeting held on 18<sup>th</sup> January 2024. The Deputy Leader also extended her gratitude to the officers for their work in putting together the revised strategy and action plan before Members.

The Cabinet Member for Environment and Leisure welcomed the report and the comments made by the Scrutiny Committee. The Cabinet Member agreed that a glossary of terms and abbreviations would be beneficial going forward.

The Cabinet **RESOLVED:**

1. To note the results and the review of the statutory public consultation on the draft LFRMS and Action Plan, which was presented to the Climate Change, Frontline Services & Prosperity Scrutiny Committee on 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2023 as per the programme of work which was agreed by Cabinet on 15<sup>th</sup> May 2023;
2. To note the feedback from the Climate and Frontline Services Committee which met on [18th January 2024](#), which will be provided by the Service Director of Democratic Services and Communication;
3. That the Local Flood Risk Management Strategy and Action Plan is adopted by the Authority; and
4. That the Local Flood Risk Management Strategy, and accompanying environmental assessment, are submitted to the Welsh Government for Ministerial approval.

**This meeting closed at 2.55 pm**

**Councillor A Morgan  
Chair.**

*Mae'r ddogfen hon ar gael yn Gymraeg / This document is also available in Welsh'*



## RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

### CABINET

21<sup>ST</sup> FEBRUARY 2024

### PRE- SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FEEDBACK

#### REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES AND COMMUNICATION

#### 1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide the feedback and comments of the items that were pre-scrutinised by the Council's thematic Scrutiny Committee's following its last Committee cycle.

#### 2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Members:

- 2.1 Note the comments and observations of the Scrutiny Committees following pre-scrutiny of the items listed within section 5 of the report.

#### 3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 The need for Members to be aware of the comments and observations of the Council's Scrutiny Committees prior to their consideration of the items listed within the Cabinet agenda for the 21<sup>st</sup> February 2024.

#### 4. BACKGROUND

- 4.1 In response to the [Local Government & Elections \(Wales\) Act 2021](#), where there is now a requirement for greater consideration of Cabinet decisions in Scrutiny, the Council's Scrutiny Committees place a greater emphasis on identifying items for pre-scrutiny to support and improve the decision making process
- 4.2 Members are reminded that the purpose of pre- scrutiny activity is to provide the key "critical friend" challenge and influence the decisions before they are made to contribute to policy and service improvement.
- 4.3 The Council's Scrutiny Committees continue to have the opportunity to scrutinise and comment on a number of reports in advance of Cabinet's consideration to bring a different perspective to the decisions being made and enabling Cabinet decisions to

be more informed. Effective scrutiny helps support the efficient delivery of public services and drives improvements within the Council's services.

## **5. ITEMS CONSIDERED FOR PRE-SCRUTINY**

5.1 Outlined below are the items that have been pre-scrutinised in line with each Committees Terms of reference for Cabinet consideration:

<b>Committee</b>	<b>Report</b>	<b>Comments</b>
Overview & Scrutiny Committee	<a href="#"><u>LOCAL AUTHORITY ARRANGEMENTS TO SAFEGUARD CHILDREN AND ADULTS AT RISK</u></a>	<p>A letter to the Cabinet providing the feedback of the Committee is attached as Appendix 1 of the report.</p> <p>In summary, the following points were raised:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lone working policy and relevant training considerations</li> <li>• Communications</li> <li>• Forms of Exploitation - Hate Crimes reference</li> <li>• Further guidance on the protected characteristics sought before adoption.</li> </ul>

## **6. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS**

6.1 An Equality Impact Assessment is not needed because the contents of the report are for information purposes only.

## **7. CONSULTATION/INVOLVEMENT**

7.1 Details of the Scrutiny involvement and consultation are highlighted within section 5 of the report.

## **8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)**

8.1 None

## **9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED**

9.1 none

## **10. LINKS TO THE COUNCIL'S CORPORATE PLAN / OTHER CORPORATE PRIORITIES**

10.1 The work of all Councillors, through pre-scrutiny of Cabinet decisions is fundamental to the work of the Council and subsequently the delivery of the Corporate Plan

## **11. CONCLUSION**

11.1 It is recognised that scrutiny is a vital component of good governance and improves Councils' decision making, service provision and cost effectiveness.

11.2 The undertaking of pre-scrutiny by the relevant Scrutiny Committee will strengthen accountability and assist Cabinet Members in taking any future decisions on these matters.

**Other Information:-**

***Relevant Scrutiny Committee***

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972**

**AS AMENDED BY**

**THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985**

**RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**CABINET**

**21<sup>st</sup> February 2024**

**REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES AND  
COMMUNICATION**

Item: **PRE – DECISION SCRUTINY**

**Background Papers**





30 January 2024

**Re: Pre-Scrutiny of the Local Authority's arrangements to Safeguard Children and Adults at Risk**

Dear Cabinet Members

I have been instructed by this Council's Overview & Scrutiny Committee to convey the comments and observations of Members in relation to the Local Authority's arrangements to Safeguard Children and Adults at Risk

The Overview & Scrutiny Committee had the opportunity to pre-scrutinise the arrangements at its meeting on the 29<sup>th</sup> January 2024. Members undertook a constructive discussion in respect of the proposals. The Members' comments are summarised below.

Reassurance was sought around the Council's Corporate Safeguarding responsibilities in relation to lone working which now extends to office workers, as well as those who worked alone in their day to day role prior to the pandemic and urged that there are no delays to the lone working policy and any training being rolled out to staff.

A Member sought clarity on how the new arrangements will be communicated to schools to ensure they adopt the latest guidance to revise their own policies. The Committee were reassured to hear that arrangements through the Corporate Safeguarding Steering Group ensure that there is clear line of communication with all schools to ensure they receive the necessary guidance and support.

A Member referred to the Forms of Exploitation section in the report and referenced that Hate Crime is listed under this section, which they did not consider is a form of exploitation or a protected characteristic. The Member also added that the protected characteristics were not accurate and recommended that further guidance on this was sought before being adopted.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee were grateful for the opportunity to pre-scrutinise the arrangements. A copy of the recording of the meeting can be found [here](#)

Yours sincerely,



Christian Hanagan  
Service Director Democratic Services and Communications  
Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council

## RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

### CABINET

21<sup>st</sup> February 2024

### THE COUNCIL'S 2024/25 REVENUE BUDGET

**REPORT OF THE DEPUTY CHIEF EXECUTIVE & GROUP DIRECTOR - FINANCE, DIGITAL AND FRONTLINE SERVICES IN DISCUSSION WITH THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL, CLLR A MORGAN OBE**

**AUTHOR: Barrie Davies (01443 424026)**

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

- 1.1 At its meeting on the 24<sup>th</sup> January 2024, the Cabinet agreed draft budget proposals for the 2024/25 revenue budget strategy.
- 1.2 These proposals have now been consulted upon as part of a second phase of budget consultation and the results are now available for Cabinet to consider and amend as necessary the draft budget strategy which they would wish to recommend to Council.

#### **2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is recommended that the Cabinet:

- 2.1 Review and, if appropriate, amend the Budget Strategy which they wish to recommend to Council on the 6<sup>th</sup> March 2024; and
- 2.2 Authorise (and recommend to Council) the Deputy Chief Executive and Group Director of Finance, Digital and Frontline Services to amend the final budget consequential to the receipt of the Final Settlement as set out in Section 4.

#### **3.0 BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 On the 24<sup>th</sup> January 2024, Cabinet agreed draft proposals for the revenue budget strategy for financial year 2024/25.
- 3.2 These proposals have been subject to a second phase of consultation which ran from the 24<sup>th</sup> January to the 9<sup>th</sup> February 2024. The results of this consultation exercise are now available for Cabinet.

- 3.3 The proposals have been incorporated into a draft budget strategy report to Council and this is attached at Appendix A. The results of the Phase 2 consultation process is also attached to that report.
- 3.4 It is now for Cabinet to consider the feedback received from Phase 2 and determine whether they would wish to amend the draft budget strategy.

#### **4.0 THE FINAL LOCAL GOVERNMENT SETTLEMENT FOR 2024/25**

- 4.1 The timing of the Local Government Settlement for 2024/25 has followed the UK Government Autumn Statement as announced on the 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2023.
- 4.2 The Final Local Government Settlement for 2024/25 is expected to be received late February / early March 2024.
- 4.3 In order to ensure that Cabinet are able to recommend a balanced budget to Council on the 6<sup>th</sup> March 2024, and given the timing of the Final Settlement, it will be necessary to authorise the Deputy Chief Executive and Group Director of Finance, Digital and Frontline Services to amend the budget to deal with any change between the Provisional and Final Settlement. It is proposed that any change is dealt with by means of amending the contribution from our Medium Term Financial Planning and Service Transformation Reserve.

#### **5.0 EQUALITY & DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS / SOCIO ECONOMIC DUTY**

- 5.1 Due regard has been given to the Council's public sector equality duties under the Equality Act 2010, namely the Public Sector Equality Duty and Socio-Economic Duty.
- 5.2 An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed and concluded that the recommendations set out in the report are in line with the above legislation.

#### **6. WELSH LANGUAGE IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 The allocation of resources, as set out in the proposed 2024/25 Budget Strategy, is based on supporting the Council's service delivery requirements and associated statutory responsibilities for the forthcoming year. In doing so, the proposed strategy is in line with the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011.

## **7.0 CONSULTATION**

- 7.1 The proposed approach to budget consultation for 2024/25 was set out in the Cabinet report dated 23<sup>rd</sup> October 2023. It comprised 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 agreed the draft budget strategy, and in light of the provisional local government settlement, then this draft strategy was consulted upon as part of Phase 2.

## **8.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

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

## **9.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS or LEGISLATION CONSIDERED**

- 9.1 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 2024/25 Revenue Budget Strategy in line with the "Budget and Policy Framework", as set out in the Council's Constitution, will support compliance with the above legal requirements.

## **10.0 LINKS TO CORPORATE AND NATIONAL PRIORITIES AND THE WELL-BEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS ACT**

- 10.1 The 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.

## **11.0 CONCLUSION**

- 11.1 The feedback from the second phase of budget consultation is now available for Cabinet to review and, if appropriate, amend their draft budget strategy proposals which they wish to recommend to Council on the 6<sup>th</sup> March 2024.

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**APPENDIX A**

**RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**MUNICIPAL YEAR 2023-2024**

**COMMITTEE:  
COUNCIL**

**6<sup>th</sup> March 2024**

<b>AGENDA ITEM NO.</b>	
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<b>THE COUNCIL'S 2024/25 REVENUE BUDGET STRATEGY</b>	
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**REPORT OF:**

**THE CABINET**

**AUTHOR: Barrie Davies, Deputy Chief Executive and Group Director – Finance, Digital and Frontline Services Tel. No. 01443 424026**

**1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

1.1 This report provides information on the provisional local government settlement for 2024/25 and sets out the recommendations of the Cabinet with regard to the Council's Revenue Budget and the level of Council Tax for the year ending 31<sup>st</sup> March 2025.

**2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is recommended that Members:

- 2.1 Note the letter from the Minister for Finance and Local Government (Rebecca Evans MS) and the table on the 2024/25 Provisional local government settlement, reproduced at Appendix 1;
- 2.2 Note the implications for the Council and the remaining budget gap as set out at section 5;
- 2.3 Agree a Council Tax increase for 2024/25 of 4.90%;
- 2.4 Agree the uplift to the aggregate Schools Budget as detailed at section 8;
- 2.5 Agree the budget strategy proposals as set out at paragraphs 10.2 to 10.4;
- 2.6 Agree the use of the 'Medium Term Financial Planning & Service Transformation Reserve' as transition funding, totalling £7.003M for 2024/25;

- 2.7 Approve Tables 4 and 5 in Section 13 of the report as the basis of allocating resources to the Individual Schools Budget (ISB), to other Council Services and to meet its corporate financing requirements;
- 2.8 Agree the Council's overall budget for 2024/25 at £630.861M, in order to pass the necessary statutory resolutions to set the Council Tax for the forthcoming financial year by the statutory deadline of the 11<sup>th</sup> March 2024; and
- 2.9 Authorise the Deputy Chief Executive and Group Director of Finance, Digital and Frontline Services to amend the final budget consequential to the receipt of the Final Local Government Settlement as set out at paragraph 10.9.

### **3.0 BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 At the Council meeting on the 29<sup>th</sup> November 2023, the Council's audited accounts were presented which reported General Fund Balances amounting to £10.240M.
- 3.2 Given the continuing financial pressures the Council is working under, it remains the view of the Deputy Chief Executive and Group Director of Finance, Digital and Frontline Services (Section 151 Officer) 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.
- 3.3 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 Audit Wales. Members will be aware that included in these Reserves is a Medium Term Financial Planning and Service Transformation Reserve that has been used successfully as transitional funding as part of the Council's Medium Term Service Planning arrangements. It has achieved this through helping to smooth the delivery of budget savings over a number of years, whilst still allowing an annual balanced budget to be delivered. The starting point for the Medium Term Financial Planning and Service Transformation Reserve as at the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023 is £4.887M. As part of our ongoing strategy, we have continued to identify and deliver savings in-year. We have also been able to reprioritise existing earmarked reserves. This 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 £9.529M (additional in year savings to date of £2.142M plus £2.500M of reprioritised funding).
- 3.4 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. For the current financial year, the budget strategy balanced a



£38.3M budget gap, the largest this Council has ever faced, and it is against this backdrop that the 2024/25 budget requirement is being formulated.

- 3.5 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.
- 3.6 The latest Audit Wales Assurance and Risk Assessment Review (Nov 2022) referenced :
- *The Council is now facing significant financial pressures, but remains well-placed to respond to these;*
  - *We remain assured about the Council's financial position and its arrangements to help it address these pressures;*
  - *The Council has not yet set out in detail how it will meet the increased budget gap. However, overall, we remain assured that the Council has a solid financial position and arrangements to help it prepare for the pressures it is facing. It continues to have a range of options available to it to manage its budget pressures;*
  - *We have continued to find no major concerns about the Council's management of its reserves;*
  - *It continues to have a healthy reserves position. This gives the Council a degree of resilience to help it manage its budgetary pressures.*
- 3.7 The challenge once again, therefore, is to construct a prudent, equitable and fair revenue budget for the financial year ending the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2025. This must involve an approach which publicly demonstrates sound financial stewardship; which does not take unnecessary risks; which maximises income generation; continues to deliver (as far as possible, and where available) 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.
- 3.8 In the context of this overall financial position and Medium Term Financial Planning projections, the Cabinet, assisted by the Senior Leadership Team was able to commence early and initial work on its budget strategy for 2024/25. The broad objectives of next year's recommended strategy are to:
- (i) Support the delivery of our key strategic priorities;
  - (ii) Retain the support of Audit Wales for the approach the Council has adopted to securing strong financial management;
  - (iii) Continue with the delivery of our key services and protect as many local jobs as possible whilst continuing to maximise efficiency; and
  - (iv) Take a responsible approach to the level of Council Tax.

#### **4.0 THE 2024/25 LOCAL GOVERNMENT SETTLEMENT**

4.1 The timing of the Local Government Settlement in Wales for 2024/25 has followed the UK Government Autumn Statement as announced on the 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2023.

4.2 On the 20<sup>th</sup> December 2023, the Minister for Finance and Local Government (Rebecca Evans MS) announced the Provisional 2024/25 Local Government Settlement. The Minister's letter and key data table is attached at Appendix 1<sup>1</sup>.

4.3 The "headlines" of the Provisional 2024/25 Settlement are as follows:-

- a. The overall increase in Revenue Support Grant (RSG) and Non-Domestic Rates (NDR) funding for 2024/25 (of unhypothecated funding) at an all Wales level, after adjusting for transfers is 3.1% (+£169.8M).
- b. The settlement for Rhondda Cynon Taf, amounts to an increase of 2.8% which is below the average all Wales increase. Settlement figures across Wales range from 2.0% to 4.7%.
- c. A funding 'floor' protection has been included for 2024/25 so that no Council receives a settlement below 2.0%.
- d. There are no transfers into / out of the Settlement for 2024/25.
- e. The Settlement provides no indication of future year settlement levels.
- f. Provisional figures and indicative estimates for 2024/25 are also included for specific grants, at an all Wales level. The Social Care Workforce Grant will reduce from £45M to £35M (all Wales level), a reduction of £0.815M for this Council. This funds our core base budget.
- g. The Council's General Capital Funding allocation is reduced by £0.058M to £13.828M<sup>1</sup>.

#### **5.0 COUNCIL BASE BUDGET REQUIREMENT 2024/25**

5.1 In anticipation of the 2024/25 local government settlement, the Council's service managers have constructed the base budget requirements for next financial year. Those initial calculations provided for:-

- Estimated employee costs, pension costs and National Insurance Contribution levels;

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<sup>1</sup> Provisional Local Government Settlement - as reissued with minor updates 11<sup>th</sup> January 2024.

- Non-pay (i.e. goods and services) inflationary implications, including energy and fuel;
- Corporate financing requirements and levies; and
- Full year effects of any additional burdens imposed on the Council and the implications of demand led pressures.

5.2 The Council's updated budget requirement was presented to Council on the 17<sup>th</sup> January 2024 alongside the implications of the Provisional Local Government Settlement which was announced on the 20<sup>th</sup> December 2023.

5.3 After taking into account the updated budget requirement and the provisional settlement increase of 2.8%, the Council's updated Tax Base plus the already agreed budget reduction measures of £10.743M, the Council was faced with a **remaining budget gap of £25.910M**.

5.4 It was against this position which the Cabinet have considered their further budget strategy options for 2024/25.

## 6.0 DEVELOPING AN EQUITABLE, DELIVERABLE AND BALANCED BUDGET FOR 2024/25

6.1 Whilst the overall settlement has been protected at +3.1% in line with the indicative settlement provided alongside the current year's budget, it remains a challenge for local government, as the following extract from the Minister's statement recognises :

*"I recognise that while the recent very high rates of inflation are now decreasing, they are still high by the standards of the last 15 years. Baseline costs for staff and services have increased and are not reducing. Demand for services, alongside cost pressures mean that your Authorities will need to make difficult decisions on services, efficiencies, and council tax in setting your budgets."*

6.2 It also follows a sustained period of real term reductions to our funding levels, recovery from significant storm damage, the pandemic and a cost of living crisis, 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.

6.3 The Council's overall financial position was set out at Section 3 of the report. 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 along with any other available reserves, whilst targeting and protecting resources for our high priority, customer-focused public services.

6.4 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; and
- d) Resources to fund the Council Tax Reduction Scheme.

6.5 As part of our updated budget requirement, appropriate sums have been set aside for these corporate financial requirements.

6.6 The Council also continues to monitor the financial implications of service demand post pandemic, alongside ensuring ongoing service continuity at a time of unprecedented cost increases both to the Council and its partners and contractors.

## **7.0 COUNCIL TAX LEVELS**

7.1 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 proposal is to increase Council Tax in 2024/25 by 4.90%. This proposed increase equates to £1.01 per week for a person living in a Band A property and £1.52 per week for a person living in a Band D property (42% of properties in Rhondda Cynon Taf are Band A). Increasing Council Tax by 4.90% will reduce the remaining budget gap by £1.029M.

7.2 Members will be aware that the cost of the CTRS is impacted by changes in caseload and by changes to the level of Council Tax. This 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 £1.287M (at the 2024/25 tax base level) but will also cost £0.258M in additional CTRS requirements. It therefore follows that a 1% increase generates a net additional income of £1.029M, or stated another way, 20% of any Council Tax increase is lost to support the increased costs associated with Welsh Government’s CTRS.

## **8.0 SCHOOLS BUDGET (ISB)**

- 8.1 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.
- 8.2 The Schools Budget (ISB) has increased and been protected from the worst of the impact of austerity, with an increase over the last 10 years of 34%, at a time when other council budgets have increased by 17%. This would equate to an extra £26M having been provided to schools as compared to other council services.
- 8.3 The restated initial budget gap at provisional settlement of £36.6M which the Council faced equated to 6.6% of our budget, excluding authority wide budgets. Schools have benefitted from significant one off resources from Welsh Government over recent years and have been previously advised to use their reserves responsibly to assist them in their financial planning over this challenging period. For context, the aggregate level of school balances increased from £12M to £20M over the course of the financial year 2021/22 and were £15M as at the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023. It is noted that schools will have used reserves as part of agreeing their budget for this financial year (2023/24).
- 8.4 The strategy now proposed will see schools allocated funding next year to cover in full all their pay pressures including all pay awards. This is notwithstanding the fact that Welsh Government have not provided additional funding in respect of the costs of increased teacher pay awards for the current year.
- 8.5 Over and above this and after adjusting for reduced energy costs, the Council will provide schools with a further £1M base budget toward their non pay costs. This includes the funding from the charge for the additional childcare available alongside free breakfast club provision. This will see the schools budget increase by £11.9M for next year, or 6.4%.
- 8.6 After absorbing non pay inflationary costs, as all other Council Services are being required to do, this would mean that schools would have to contribute to balancing the overall budget gap by delivering an efficiency of 1.3%.
- 8.7 Funding in respect of the additional costs associated with Teachers Pensions remains expected to be provided by UK Government so these costs are assumed to be fully funded.

*“The Chancellor’s Autumn Statement referred to the changes to the SCAPE rate, which has implications for the costs of employers’ contributions to teachers and fire-fighter pensions. This in turn has implications for Local Authority budgets. Funding for this is expected to be provided by UK Government but not until 2024-2025. I will be writing to the Chief Secretary to the Treasury to press for assurances on the level and timing of this funding. My officials will keep your officers informed.”*

## 9.0 **EFFICIENCY**

- 9.1 Council services have for many years now delivered against ambitious efficiency targets, making considerable budget reductions without adversely impacting on front line service provision.
- 9.2 As part of the current year's budget strategy, £16.1M of Efficiency and Service Operational Reconfiguration measures were identified and delivered.
- 9.3 Senior officers continued to work through the year to identify options to deliver budget reduction measures early and to ensure that front line services continue to be protected as much as possible. Service managers were engaged across all service areas ensuring that all contributed to the challenging position which we were facing.
- 9.4 Over a number of months including challenge sessions with the Senior Leadership Team, options have been identified and assessed against the service level and resident impact to ensure that our vital services were protected and maintained wherever possible. Following this assessment the Senior Leadership Team have already been able to agree proposals amounting to £8.245M as was reported to Cabinet on the 20<sup>th</sup> November 2023.
- 9.5 Following the continuation of this work, the Senior Leadership Team have been able to identify a further range of measures which would reduce our base budget requirement by **£5.246M**.
- 9.6 The proposals can be summarised as follows :

Table 1 : Efficiency and Service Operational Reconfiguration

<b>Categorisation</b>	<b>£'000</b>
General Efficiency Measures - cost reduction / additional income	2,104
General Efficiency Measures - service restructuring and vacancy management	1,081
Operational Service Reconfiguration	905
General Efficiency Measures - Recharge of costs / use of external funding	1,156
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>5,246</b>

- 9.7 The Senior Leadership Team can again provide assurance to Cabinet, that the measures proposed can be delivered operationally and without a significant detrimental impact on our front line services.

## **10.0 SPECIFIC SERVICE / EXPENDITURE CHANGES**

10.1 This Council has taken proactive steps to dealing with the budget pressures it continues to face including delivery of 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.

10.2 As part of this budget strategy, a number of reviews have also been undertaken to ensure that the budget reflects updated projections of demand and cost.

### **a. Energy**

The current year increases for our energy costs were around a 283% increase for gas and a 147% increase for electricity. At the time we set the budget, latest forecasts were projecting likely lower costs for the following year 2024/25, and to recognise this “spike” in costs an energy reserve (£5M) was set up to fund the costs during 2023/24.

Detailed monitoring and scrutiny has taken place across our energy budgets during the current year alongside the most up to date forecasts for costs into next financial year.

The position anticipated above (i.e. a spike in cost for the current year and lower tariff rates for 2024/25) materialised and we are consequently able to reduce our base budget requirement for next financial year.

In addition, the development of a proposed Council owned solar farm is now progressing with completion anticipated during 2024/25 financial year. The funding arrangements will be set out in the Council’s new 3 year capital programme but we are now able to factor in a part year income stream from the generation and sale of energy in line with an agreement already in place.

As a consequence of the above, it is possible to reduce the Council’s budget requirement by **£4,479k**.

### **b. Base Budget Updates**

The Council has reviewed its base budget requirements in light of ongoing service requirements and pressures and can make a number of adjustments in this respect. This includes :

- Funding arrangements in respect of Graduates and Apprentices, recognising that such roles are now being mainstreamed and funded by service areas as part of their workforce planning arrangements;

- Income being generated from the successful roll out of our staff benefits scheme and over and above the level which has already been reinvested back into our staff development programmes;
- Reflecting the updated contribution levels to joint arrangements including the Central South Consortium Joint Education Service and the updated arrangements for the delivery of the Council's Internal Audit Service; and
- Reflecting up to date caseload and demand pressures for the Council Tax Reduction Scheme.

The above base budget updates reduce the Council's budget requirement by **£1,338k**.

**c. Additional Childcare prior to the Commencement of Free Breakfast Club Provision**

The Cabinet have now agreed to implement a proposal to charge for the wraparound childcare element which is provided alongside the Free Breakfast Club provision at £60 per term for 5 days per week or £40 per term for up to 3 days per week.

The implementation of this proposal would reduce the Council's budget by **£495k** (full year) with this income being ringfenced and reinvested into our schools' budget.

**d. Capitalisation**

Expenditure has been identified which is currently funded from our revenue budgets which could, in line with accounting rules, be funded from our capital budgets. These expenditure items relate to IT software licence costs and vehicle purchases.

The Senior Leadership Team have considered the impact upon our capital programme, in the context of the overall quantum of the programme across 3 years and concluded that a reduction in our core programme can be delivered. Opportunities will be taken to top up any specific areas of demand or areas of particular impact through one off investment funding opportunities and / or additional in-year funding approvals going forward. The Council's updated 3 year capital programme 2024/25 to 2026/27 will set out full details.

The proposal would reduce the revenue budget by **£500k**.

**e. Fees and Charges**

It is proposed that all Fees and Charges are subject to a 5.0% standard increase, recognising the significant increase in our cost base and subsequent level of subsidy. A number of areas are proposed to be subject to



specific treatment, as set out in the [Fees and Charges Proposals 2024/25](#) already considered by Cabinet and now consulted upon.

These proposals would generate additional income of **£452k**.

- 10.3 On 24<sup>th</sup> January 2024, the UK Government announced it would be increasing its 2024/25 local government settlement by £600M in England, with a consequential allocation of around £25M for Wales. On the 7<sup>th</sup> February 2024, the Welsh Government Minister for Finance and Local Government announced that the £25M would be allocated to local government in the Final Budget, restoring the Social Care Workforce Grant to £45M (all Wales) with the remaining balance allocated to the Revenue Support Grant. This Council can expect to receive additional resources amounting to circa £1.950M as a result of this.
- 10.4 The financial implications (including part-year impact) of the above proposals are shown in the following table.

Table 2 : Budget Strategy - Specific Service / Expenditure Changes

	£'000	£'000
<b>Remaining Budget Gap at Provisional Settlement</b>		<b>25,910</b>
Schools Budget	- 3,418	
Council Tax	- 1,029	
Service Efficiencies	- 5,246	
Energy Budget Requirement	- 4,479	
Base Budget Adjustments	- 1,338	
Charging for Childcare (alongside free breakfast clubs)	- 495	
Capitalisation	- 500	
Fees and Charges	- 452	
		- 16,957
Additional Resources at Final Settlement		- 1,950
<b>Remaining Budget Gap</b>		<b>7,003</b>

- 10.5 *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.
- 10.6 As previously referenced at section 3, the reserve currently stands at £9.529M, having been replenished and increased during this year (2023/24). Accordingly, to address the remaining budget gap, it is proposed that an

allocation of £7.003M is made from this reserve for 2024/25. This would facilitate a balanced budget for 2024/25 and would leave £2.526M in the reserve (subject to the year-end assessment of reserves). Processes are now sufficiently well embedded to ensure that savings are achieved in-year and that this reserve can continue to be replenished.

Table 3 : Balancing the Budget 2024/25

	£'000
Remaining Budget Gap	7,003
Use of Transition Funding / Reserves	- 7,003
<b>Remaining Budget Gap 2024/25</b>	<b>-</b>

- 10.7 The above provides a robust and balanced budget strategy for financial year 2024/25 which is now recommended to Council.
- 10.8 The Final Local Government Settlement for 2024/25 is expected to be received late February / early March 2024.
- 10.9 It is proposed that the Deputy Chief Executive and Group Director of Finance, Digital and Frontline Services be authorised to amend the budget to deal with any change between Provisional and Final Settlement. Any change to the net budget requirement is proposed to be dealt with by means of amending the contribution from the Medium Term Financial Planning and Service Transformation Reserve.

## **11.0 SERVICE PRIORITIES**

- 11.1 Even after 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.
- 11.2 The Council's Corporate Plan sets out that our key purpose is to provide strong community leadership and create the environment for people and businesses to be independent, healthy and prosperous.
- 11.3 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 early identification of in-year savings opportunities. The Council has already invested over £161M (over and above the normal Capital Programme) in areas supporting key Corporate Plan priorities since October 2015, the latest investment (£7.730M) being agreed by Council in September 2023.

11.4 A report setting out the updated capital programme for 2024/25 to 2026/27 will be reported for Members consideration alongside this revenue budget strategy.

## **12.0 THE 2024/25 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 approach to budget consultation for 2024/25 was set out in the Cabinet report dated 23<sup>rd</sup> October 2023. 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 agreed a draft budget strategy, and in light of the provisional local government settlement, then this draft strategy was consulted upon as part of Phase 2.

12.3 The Phase 1 Consultation report was considered by Cabinet on the 24<sup>th</sup> January 2024 alongside the initial budget proposals which were then consulted upon as part of Phase 2.

12.4 The Phase 2 Consultation report is now attached at Appendix 2. The phase 2 consultation process ran from the 24<sup>th</sup> January 2024 to the 9<sup>th</sup> February 2024 and included:

- On-line questionnaire and Poll via the Let's Talk website;
- Email to all Key stakeholders;
- Young person's face to face engagement via schools;
- Promotion through social media;
- A telephone consultation option through the Council's Contact Centre and a freepost address for postal responses;
- Meetings with:
  - Older Persons Advisory Group;
  - The Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee;
  - School Budget Forum; and
  - Joint Consultative Committee.

12.5 With regard to the consultation activity undertaken with the Overview & Scrutiny Committee, School Budget Forum and Joint Consultative Committee, the extracts of the minutes from these meetings are attached at Appendices 3, 4 and 5 respectively.

### 13.0 THE 2024/25 MACRO REVENUE BUDGET

- 13.1 In arriving at a strategy for 2024/25, the Cabinet has taken into consideration its key commitments, its views on service delivery and relevant charges for services and the need to minimise the tax burden on local residents. Consequently, and after careful deliberation, the Cabinet has concluded that it can now propose a balanced revenue budget which will meet all of the fundamental requirements of its preferred strategy **and** minimise the Council Tax increase for next year.
- 13.2 Table 4 below illustrates how the revenue resources available to the Council could be utilised, with a Council Tax increase of 4.90%:

**Table 4: Proposed Resources in 2024/25**

	£'000
2024/25 Net Revenue Spending	630,861
<b>LESS:</b> Revenue Support Grant & NDR Contribution	485,247
<b>LESS:</b> Social Care Workforce Grant	3,668
<b>Sub total</b>	<b>141,946</b>
<b>LESS:</b> Release of Earmarked Reserves	7,003
<b>To be met from Council Taxpayers</b>	<b>134,943</b>

- 13.3 Table 5 below, shows the overall effect on services of applying the principles of the Cabinet's recommended outline 2024/25 budget strategy.

**Table 5: Application of the 2024/25 Outline Budget Strategy**

<b>BUDGET REQUIREMENTS</b>	<b>2023/24</b>	<b>2024/25</b>	<b>Increase/ (Decrease)</b>
	£'000	£'000	£'000
<b><u>Corporate Requirements</u></b>			
Capital Financing	21,708	21,708	0
Levies	14,960	15,728	768
Council Tax Reduction Scheme	25,784	26,547	763
Miscellaneous	14,261	13,215	(1,046)
	<b>76,713</b>	<b>77,198</b>	<b>485</b>
<b><u>Individual School Budgets (ISB)</u></b>			
Individual School Budgets	186,976	197,962	10,986
<b><u>Other Council Services</u></b>			
Community & Children's Services	202,148	210,100	7,952
Finance, Digital and Frontline Services	79,595	82,247	2,652
Chief Executive's	28,499	27,177	(1,322)
Education & Inclusion Services	36,024	36,177	153
<b>Net Revenue Spending</b>	<b>609,955</b>	<b>630,861</b>	<b>20,906</b>

#### **14.0 SPECIFIC GRANTS**

- 14.1 For next year, the Welsh Government is to provide around £1.4Bn in Specific Revenue Grants to Welsh Local Authorities.
- 14.2 Whilst specific grants dilute local accountability, such funding does enable us to undertake projects and deliver services that otherwise may not have been possible. Whilst we will continue to make representation for such funding to be transferred into the Revenue Support Grant, until they do so then specific grants will continue to supplement our base revenue budget.
- 14.3 By their nature, specific grants are often directed toward specific spend areas or policy objectives and are not certain in terms of their ongoing continuation nor value, presenting uncertainty in terms of forward planning.
- 14.4 The allocation of specific grants, however, remains a key feature of the annual local government settlement, albeit there is a commitment to reduce such hypothecation. There are also a number of specific grants which have been introduced to deal with recurring cost pressures (eg Social Care Workforce Grant) and it is important that we seek to ensure their continuation beyond 2024/25.

#### **15.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY / SOCIO ECONOMIC DUTY IMPLICATIONS**

- 15.1 Due regard has been given to the Council's public sector equality duties under the Equality Act 2010, namely the Public Sector Equality Duty and Socio-Economic Duty.
- 15.2 An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed and concluded that the recommendations set out in the report are in line with the above legislation.

## **16. WELSH LANGUAGE IMPLICATIONS**

- 16.1 The allocation of resources, as set out in the recommended 2024/25 Budget Strategy, is based on supporting the Council's service delivery requirements and associated statutory responsibilities for the forthcoming year. In doing so, the recommended strategy is in line with the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011.

## **17.0 CONSULTATION**

- 17.1 Consultation and engagement has been undertaken as part of formulating the recommended 2024/25 Revenue Budget Strategy, the detail of which is set out in Section 12 of the report.

## **18.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)**

- 18.1 The financial implications of the recommendations are set out in the main body of the Report.

## **19.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED**

- 19.1 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 recommended 2024/25 Revenue Budget Strategy and its reporting to full Council ensures compliance with these legal duties.

## **20.0 LINKS TO CORPORATE AND NATIONAL PRIORITIES AND THE WELL-BEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS ACT**

- 20.1 The recommended 2024/25 Revenue Budget Strategy has been formulated to support the delivery of the Council's strategic priorities and Corporate Plan. The plan is aligned to the goals and principles included within the Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act.

## **21.0 CONCLUSIONS**

- 21.1 The Council's overall financial position remains sound, with General Reserves maintained at the recommended minimum level of £10M.
- 21.2 On the 20<sup>th</sup> December 2023, the Minister for Finance and Local Government (Rebecca Evans MS) announced the Provisional 2024/25 Local Government Settlement with this Council's increase in resources set at 2.8%. This was followed up with additional resources being announced for local government in Wales on the 7<sup>th</sup> February 2024, which will be formalised within the final settlement.
- 21.3 The Cabinet's proposals properly address the corporate financial requirements of the Council and allocate an adequate financial uplift to the Individual Schools Budget. The remaining resources available are allocated to fund all other services and to support our key priorities in 2024/25.
- 21.4 The Cabinet has recommended setting the 2024/25 revenue spending and budget at £630.861M which will require a Council Tax increase of 4.90% for the financial year ending the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2025.
- 21.5 The Council continues to deliver year on year balanced budgets alongside an ambitious investment programme supporting key priorities. The challenge does remain for positive and proactive management from the Senior Leadership Team and clear direction from Members to produce a robust and financially sustainable budget into the medium term in what continues to be a challenging financial climate.

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Rebecca Evans AS/MS  
Y Gweinidog Cyllid a Llywodraeth Leol  
Minister for Finance and Local Government



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

Ein cyf/Our ref: MA/RE/3147/23

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

20 December 2023

Dear Colleagues,

Today I am announcing details of the Provisional Local Government Revenue and Capital Settlement for 2024-25 (the Settlement) for county and county borough councils (authorities) in Wales through a Cabinet Written Statement. This is attached for your information.

As you know, following the UK Government Autumn Statement, the Welsh Government's resource settlement will reduce by 0.1% in 2024-25 in real terms. As I have set out in our Welsh budget, our overall funding settlement is not sufficient to meet all pressures and allow us to do all the things we want to do. We have re-shaped the indicative spending allocations within our budget to provide extra funding and protection for the services which matter most to people and communities across Wales. We have done so in line with our priorities to:

- Protect core, frontline public services as far as possible.
- Deliver the greatest benefit to households which are hardest hit.
- Prioritise jobs, wherever possible.
- Work in partnership with other public sector bodies to face this financial storm together.
- Re-focus funding away from non-devolved areas, which the UK Government should be funding.

We have taken this approach to ensure we continue to focus funding where it can have the most positive impacts in the circumstances and taking action to ensure we mitigate direct impacts to people and places, as far as possible.

In 2024-25, Welsh local authorities will receive £5.7bn from the Welsh Government Revenue Support Grant (RSG) and non-domestic rates (NDR) to spend on delivering key services. This means the core revenue funding for local government in 2024-25 will increase by 3.1% on a like-for-like basis compared to the current year. I am providing additional funding of £1.3m to ensure no authority will receive less than a 2% increase.

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

Bae Caerdydd • Cardiff Bay  
Caerdydd • Cardiff  
CF99 1SN

[Correspondence.Rebecca.Evans@gov.wales](mailto:Correspondence.Rebecca.Evans@gov.wales)  
[Gohebiaeth.Rebecca.Evans@llyw.cymru](mailto:Gohebiaeth.Rebecca.Evans@llyw.cymru)

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.

We have made the protection of the indicative rise of 3.1% in the local government Settlement announced in the Budget in March a priority in setting our draft budget. In line with our focus on supporting households, this maintenance of our investment in your services protects households and the critical services you deliver to your communities.

In addition to the core Settlement, I am publishing indicative information on specific revenue and capital grants planned for 2024-25, which amount to over £1.3bn for revenue and over £960m for capital at this provisional stage.

As we have discussed, as part of our Programme of Government we are committed to ensuring that your authorities are not hampered by unnecessary bureaucracy. Our programme of work to reduce the number of separate grants paid to local authorities from 2024-25 and to move grants into the de-hypothecated settlement is progressing, working with your officers. Some areas have already been identified for change and the draft budget sets out how we are rationalising and refocusing education specific grants. This work continues and I expect more changes to be presented at part of the final settlement. We are due to consider packages of proposals in the Finance sub-group in January. I am committed to transparency about the movements so you and other partners can clearly see any changes in funding in the round.

Social services continue to be a priority for councils and for Welsh Government. Our joint commitment to the real living wage for care workers reflects this. The costs of enabling authorities to continue to meet the additional costs of introducing the Real Living Wage for care workers were included in the indicative budget increase announced last year.

I have again taken the decision to provide all the available funding up front and not hold back funding for in-year recognition of the 2024/25 teachers' pay deal. Authorities' budget planning must therefore accommodate these costs.

As announced on 19 December, I am providing a package of non-domestic rates support that will benefit every ratepayer in Wales. We will cap the increase to the non-domestic rates multiplier for 2024-25 to 5%, at a recurring annual cost of £18m. This is lower than the 6.7% increase that would otherwise apply.

We also continue to support ratepayers with increased liabilities following the 2023 non-domestic rates revaluation. Our transitional relief scheme continues to phase in changes for eligible ratepayers at a cost of £38m in 2024-25.

Outside of the Settlement, alongside the multiplier cap, we will be investing an additional £78m to provide a fifth successive year of support for retail, leisure and hospitality businesses with their non-domestic rates bills. This builds on the almost £1bn of support provided through our retail, leisure and hospitality rates relief schemes since 2020-21. Eligible ratepayers will receive 40% non-domestic rates relief for the duration of 2024-25. As in previous years, the relief will be capped at £110,000 per business across Wales.

I recognise that while the recent very high rates of inflation are now decreasing, they are still high by the standards of the last 15 years. Baseline costs for staff and services have increased and are not reducing. Demand for services, alongside cost pressures mean that your Authorities will need to make difficult decisions on services, efficiencies, and council tax in setting your budgets. I know you will seek to engage meaningfully with your local communities as you consider priorities for the forthcoming year.

I do not consider that it is appropriate for the Welsh Government to set an arbitrary level of council tax increase irrespective of local circumstances or choices. Your Authorities will need to take account of the full range of funding sources available to them, as well as the pressures they face. I encourage you to continue to carefully balance the impact of increases on household finances with the loss of support and services. I know that across Wales you as Leaders, elected members and officers alike will strive to find ways to make the best use of resources to make the most difference for your communities.

In line with our joint focus on supporting households, we will continue to maintain full entitlements under our Council Tax Reduction Scheme (CTRS) for 2024-25 and are again providing £244m for CTRS in the Settlement in recognition of this.

The Chancellor's Autumn Statement referred to the changes to the SCAPE rate, which has implications for the costs of employers' contributions to teachers and fire-fighter pensions. This in turn has implications for Local Authority budgets. Funding for this is expected to be provided by UK Government but not until 2024-2025. I will be writing to the Chief Secretary to the Treasury to press for assurances on the level and timing of this funding. My officials will keep your officers informed.

I set out the position on capital funding for the Welsh Government as part of my budget statement on Tuesday. With next to no increase in overall capital funding and the Welsh Government capital budget 6% lower in real terms than the current year, I have maintained the general capital funding for local authorities at £180m, the indicative level that was set last year. With soaring inflationary costs in the construction sector, I know this will mean that your authorities will have to look carefully at and prioritise your capital programmes to continue to invest to best effect in the provision of public services. I have also continued to provide £20 million capital in each year to enable authorities to respond to our joint priority of decarbonisation, to continue the focus on contributing to the Net Zero Wales plan. As for this year, I have not considered hypothecating revenue funding to support authorities' response to climate change recognising that all our decisions must consider how to reduce our ongoing emissions and to allow authorities maximum flexibility to do so and to manage their budgets.

The draft *Local Government Finance Report* and additional tables containing details of the 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 RSG and redistributed NDR. We are also providing information on revenue and capital grants which are planned for 2024-25. This information will be further updated for the final settlement.

The publication of the Settlement in mid-December has enabled us to draw on the latest tax-base figures for 2024-25, meaning that there should be no change between provisional and final settlements as a result of updates to the tax base. While I cannot guarantee that there will be no other changes between the provisional and final settlements, due to the financial uncertainty that we currently face, I do not intend making any significant changes to the methodology or the data underpinning the distribution of this Settlement.

My announcement today launches a 6-week period of formal consultation on the Settlement for 2024-25. I would be grateful if you could ensure your response arrives no later than **Wednesday, 31 January 2024**. All responses to this consultation should be sent to:

Andrea Melvin: [LGFPSettlement@gov.wales](mailto: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 decrease adverse effects, on opportunities for people to use the Welsh language and on treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language.

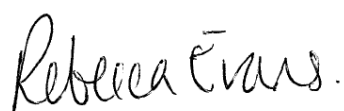
The Welsh Government intends to publish a summary of the responses. Normally, the name and address (or part of the address) of each respondent are published along with the response. If you do not wish to be identified as the author of your response, please ensure you state this explicitly in your response.

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.

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. In addition, we would also expect you to consider the impacts of budgetary options on children and young people.

Authorities also need to take account of their duties under the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the Welsh language standards in preparing plans for 2024-25.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rebecca Evans". The signature is written in a cursive style.

**Rebecca Evans AS/MS**

Y Gweinidog Cyllid a Llywodraeth Leol  
Minister for Finance and Local Government

**Table 1a: Change in Aggregate External Finance (AEF), adjusted for transfers, by Unitary Authority (£000)**

Unitary Authority	2023-24 Final Aggregate External Finance	2024-25 Provisional Aggregate External Finance	Percentage difference	Rank
Isle of Anglesey	123,866	126,973	2.5%	17
Gwynedd	227,541	232,092	2.0%	21
Conwy	198,736	202,710	2.0%	21
Denbighshire	187,785	194,744	3.7%	4
Flintshire	251,959	257,555	2.2%	20
Wrexham	224,722	231,963	3.2%	8
Powys	228,558	234,940	2.8%	11
Ceredigion	129,341	132,715	2.6%	14
Pembrokeshire	212,626	217,999	2.5%	16
Carmarthenshire	338,439	349,441	3.3%	7
Swansea	417,588	433,590	3.8%	3
Neath Port Talbot	276,915	284,624	2.8%	12
Bridgend	250,557	257,978	3.0%	10
The Vale of Glamorgan	202,631	208,896	3.1%	9
Rhondda Cynon Taf	471,049	484,112	2.8%	13
Merthyr Tydfil	118,886	122,923	3.4%	5
Caerphilly	340,037	347,726	2.3%	19
Blaenau Gwent	139,809	143,433	2.6%	15
Torfaen	172,265	177,989	3.3%	6
Monmouthshire	122,561	125,355	2.3%	18
Newport	289,306	302,973	4.7%	1
Cardiff	594,712	618,959	4.1%	2
<b>Total unitary authorities</b>	<b>5,519,889</b>	<b>5,689,689</b>	<b>3.1%</b>	

Updated and re-issued by WG 11 Jan 2024

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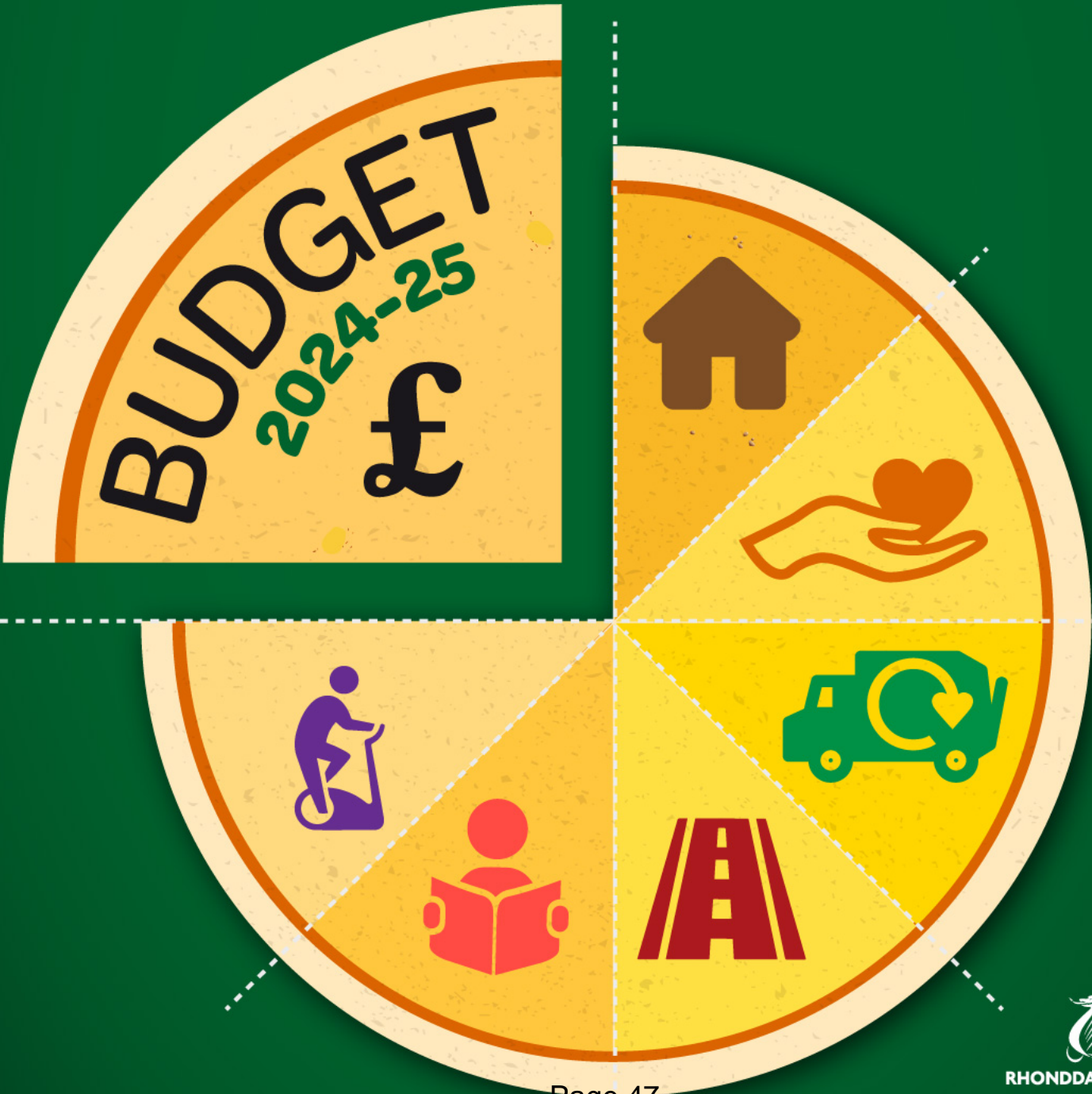
# 2024/25 BUDGET (PHASE 2)

APPENDIX 2

## Consultation Report

Rhondda Cynon Taf CBC

February 2024



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- This section provides a summary of the main findings from the Phase 2 Budget Consultation 2024-25.
- Rhondda Cynon Taf's 2024-25 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.
- 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 proposed budget. The Phase 1 consultation report was available to support the preparation of the budget strategy proposals and was presented to Cabinet on the 24<sup>th</sup> January 2024, where a draft budget strategy was agreed.
- This report presents the findings of **Phase 2** of the budget consultation, which asked for views on the draft budget strategy for 2024-25. Phase 2 of the consultation started on the 24<sup>th</sup> January 2024 and ended on the 9<sup>th</sup> February 2024.
- The Council is proposing that Council Tax be increased by 4.9% for next year, likely to be one of the lowest increases in Wales. 58.3% of respondents felt that the increase was not reasonable compared to 37.0% who fed back the proposed increase was reasonable.
- The main reasons provided by respondents who disagreed with the proposed increase in Council Tax were the ongoing Cost of Living crisis including stagnating wages against increased outgoings and dissatisfaction with service levels (and concerns about proposed/future service reductions).
- The respondents who thought that the proposed increase in Council Tax was reasonable that they believe the current financial situation requires additional Council Tax income to maintain services.
- A Quick Poll question about Council Tax was phrased differently to that in the survey, asking whether respondents agreed "with a 1% increase in Council Tax to that originally planned, from 3.9% to 4.9%". Results from this survey contradict those from the survey findings, with 67.2% agreement and 29.4% disagreement.
- The Schools Budget next year is once again being prioritised and will contribute a far lower efficiency saving than other Council Services. It is proposed to increase the Schools Budget by £11.9 million, an increase of 6.4% compared to the 2.8% increase in funding the Council is to receive from Welsh Government, as per the provisional local government settlement. 62.8% of respondents agreed with the approach to continue to

prioritise our schools and the proposed increase to the Schools budget for 2024-25.

- Significant work has been undertaken across all Council Services and budget reduction measures totalling £13 million for 2024-25 have been identified which can be delivered without significantly impacting on our front-line services. 72.9% of respondents agreed that the Council should continue to maximise efficiency and pursue these efficiency savings for next year.
- 67.5% of respondents agreed with the proposals for fees and charges.
- 75.6% of respondents agreed with the proposed approach for the use of the Council's reserves.
- 686 people were engaged in the phase 2 budget consultation. Overall (including Phase 1) over 1,200 people were engaged in the Council's 2-phase budget consultation process.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This report presents the findings of the Phase 2 Budget Consultation 2024-25.
- 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 Let's Talk engagement tools and the feedback received from the Older Persons Advisory Group (OPAG).
- 1.5 Section 5 provides feedback on the young persons' engagement.

## 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 recommend a Revenue Budget Strategy for the 2024-25 financial year.
- 2.3 Rhondda Cynon Taf's 2024-25 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 Phase 1 provided residents and stakeholders with the opportunity to feedback their views on some of the key elements used to construct the Council's proposed budget.
- 2.5 The Phase 1 [consultation report](#) was available to support the preparation of the budget strategy proposals and was presented to [Cabinet on the 24<sup>th</sup> January 2024](#), where a draft budget strategy was agreed.
- 2.6 This report presents the findings of **phase 2** of the budget consultation, which asked for views on the draft budget strategy for 2024-25.
- 2.7 Phase 2 of the consultation started on the 24<sup>th</sup> January 2024 and ended on the 9<sup>th</sup> February 2024.

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

- 3.1 This section provides a summary of the methodology used for the Phase 2 Budget Consultation 2024-25. The consultation was conducted in-house.
- 3.2 The consultation period ran from the 24<sup>th</sup> January 2024 and ended on the 9<sup>th</sup> February 2024.
- 3.3 The approach included the following methods to consult with a range of stakeholders:
  - Publication of information on the Rhondda Cynon Taf [“Let’s Talk”](#) website, which included
    - A survey
    - “Quick Poll”
    - A simplified “Easy Read” document that could be downloaded and printed for use by any audiences that felt unable to engage with the full survey format.
    - Key background documents
  - Promotion through social media
  - A face-to-face meeting with the OPAG
  - Overview & Scrutiny Committee meeting
  - School Budget Forum meeting
  - Joint Consultative Committee meeting
  - A face-to-face session with young people and engagement through Tonyrefail Community School and Treorchy Comprehensive School
  - An email sent to key stakeholders.
- 3.4 The Council provided a number of alternatives to online engagement, as it is important to continue to consider hard to reach groups, those having reduced or no access to the internet and those who prefer to engage through traditional methods. A telephone consultation option was also in place, through the Council’s contact centre. This option allows people to discuss their views or request consultation materials. Individual call backs were available on request and a consultation Freepost address was available for postal responses.
- 3.5 The Team designed an Easy Read/Plain English Document in paper format and online, to simplify some of the consultation materials.
- 3.6 686 people were engaged in the phase 2 budget consultation. Overall (including Phase 1) over 1,200 people were engaged in the Council’s 2-phase budget consultation process.

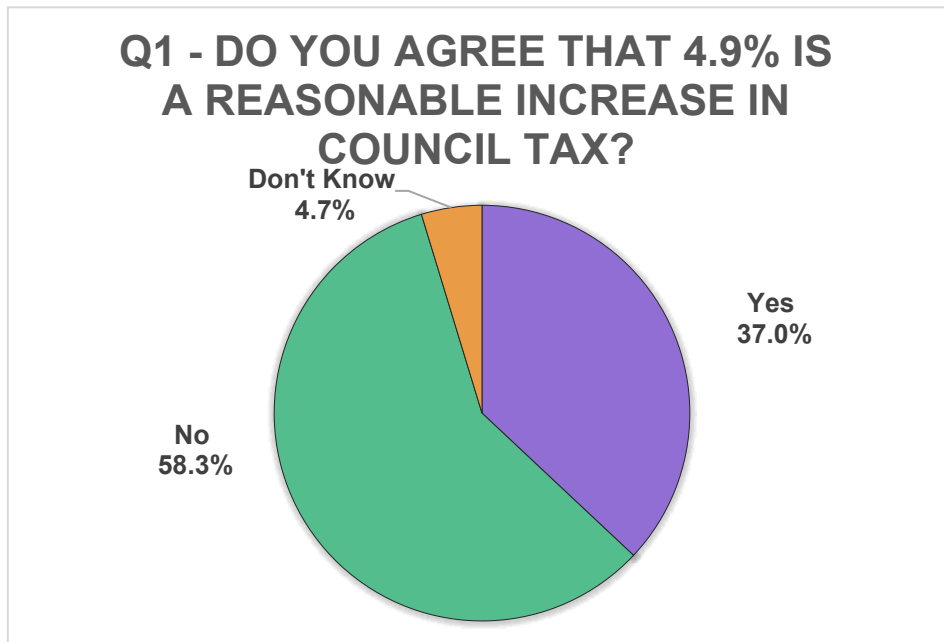
## 4. Consultation Findings

4.1 The following section outlines the results from the phase 2 budget consultation questionnaire, which received 450 responses, and also includes the feedback received from the OPAG and the young people in schools.

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 Council is proposing that Council Tax be increased by 4.9% for next year. The majority of respondents to the questionnaire felt that the increase was **not** reasonable (58.3%).



	Number	%
<b>Q1 - Do you agree that 4.9% is a reasonable increase in Council Tax?</b>	Yes	165 37.0%
	No	260 58.3%
	Don't know	21 4.7%
	Total	446

Figure 1 – Council Tax

4.3 The Poll question on the Let's Talk Budget Engagement site was completed by 204 people, with 67.2% agreeing and 29.4% disagreeing to this level of Council Tax increase. It should be noted that the wording of the poll question was different to that in the main survey, where respondents were asked if they agreed with a 1% increase in Council Tax to that originally planned, from 3.9% to 4.9%.

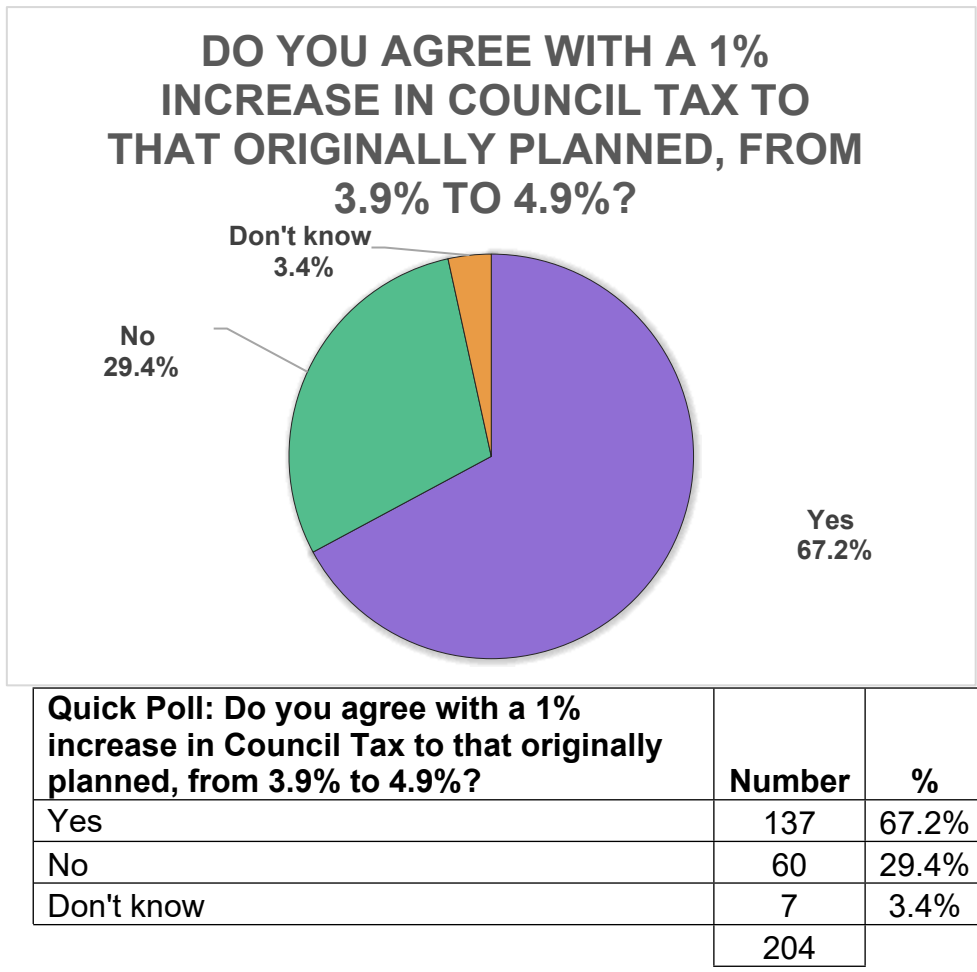


Figure 2 – Council Tax Quick Poll

4.4 A large number of comments disagreed with an increase in Council Tax and the comments can be placed under a number of themes, as follows:

**Cost of Living**

4.5 The main reason cited for disagreement with the suggested increase in Council Tax was the current cost of living crisis and that people were finding it difficult financially, with the increasing price of food, energy etc.

*"With everything else going up, it's hard enough as it is to manage without increasing more bills."*

*"An increase would put more pressure on working families."*

*"Most peoples pay hasn't gone up by that much"*

*"People are struggling now, an increase would put more pressure on already stretched households."*

*"Our monthly income is leaving us with nothing else to spare as it is, we are struggling to pay our mortgage, heating, and food. Our council tax is*

*already a bill that we struggle to keep on top of and it's increasing every year."*

*"With RCT being one of the poorest regions in wales and the uk and with a cost of living crisis and low wages in the valleys with many people spending high fuel costs to travel to work this is totally unacceptable"*

*"It's too much for struggling households to cope with on top of other financial pressures."*

The young people we spoke to in schools felt that the increase in Council Tax was unfair:

*"Alongside all the other costs, that is a lot."*

*"I think it's unfair, everything's going up, there's not enough money to live on."*

### **Dissatisfaction with Service Quality**

- 4.6 There was a level of dissatisfaction with the services received for the Council tax that is paid.

*"Services are being cut - yet we are expected to pay more."*

*"Council tax is expensive and despite receiving a discount for a single occupancy it is already extremely high with council services not being delivered well."*

*"Ridiculous. Cuts to save money by dropping bin collections to 3 weekly and now increasing council tax feels insulting and takes no regard to the residents of RCT."*

*"The roads are still in a state. Potholes everywhere, street lighting knocked off, the list goes on."*

*"Services have been reduced! So why do we have to pay more?"*

*"If things were kept at current levels then yes but we all know services are being cut"*

### **Support the increase**

- 4.7 Some of the respondents were supportive of the increase in Council tax;

*"The rise should be higher so as to prevent cuts to our public services, which will prove inevitable without a much higher rise in tax."*

*"Another year that RCT has managed to maintain a relatively low increase."*

*“As stated this increase could be one of the lowest in Wales... There being no other option !!!!”*

*“Given the hole RCT is in I agree that a 4.9% increase this year is necessary and could be considered reasonable however I also feel that the council needs to look into efficiency improvements throughout its organisation.”*

*“I believe it’s necessary but not reasonable “*

*“I don’t think any rise in Council Tax is reasonable, however, with the budget problems a 4.9% raise is acceptable.”*

*“It is quite a jump, but due to current situation may be only option.”*

*“its a lot to put on tax payers but if its the only way to keep hold of our public services then it has to be done”*

*“Raise it a little more”*

*“This is very reasonable in comparison to neighbouring authorities proposals”*

- 4.8 OPAG members accepted that the increase was necessary given the financial situation the Council is in.

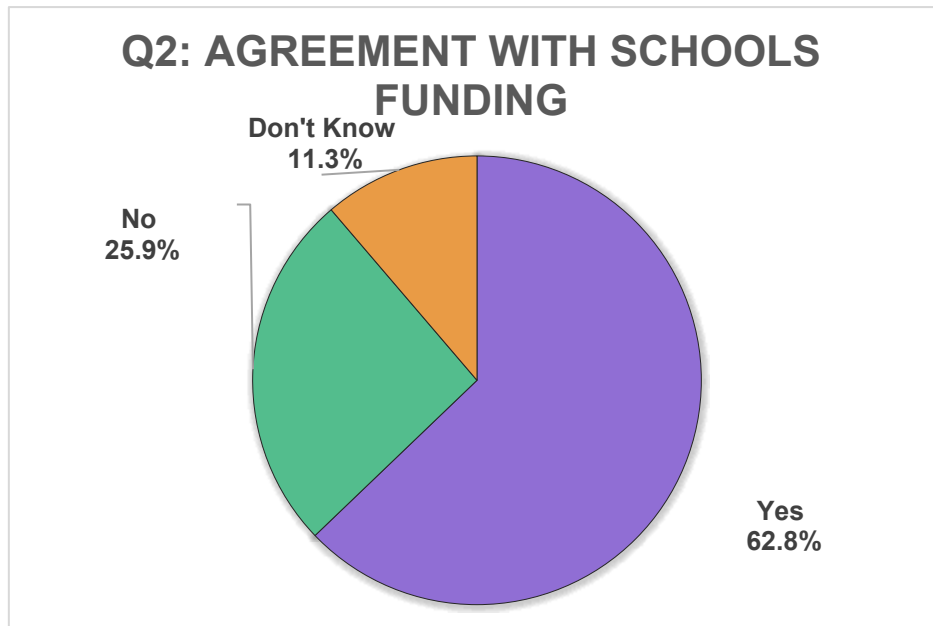
### **Schools Funding**

- 4.9 The Schools Budget next year is once again being prioritised and will have to contribute a lower efficiency saving than other Council Services.

It is proposed to increase the Schools Budget by £11.9 million, an increase of 6.4% as compared to the 2.8% increase in funding the Council is to receive from Welsh Government, as per the provisional local government settlement.

62.8% of respondents agreed with the approach and the proposed increase to the Schools budget for 2024-25.





		Number	%
<b>Q2 - Schools</b>	Yes	279	62.8%
	No	115	25.9%
	Don't know	50	11.3%
	Total	444	

Figure 3 – Schools

4.10 The majority of comments welcomed the approach for funding schools.

**Support for additional funding:**

*"Children are the future so must have a good education."*

*"Schools are important and our children need safe and secure places to be educated."*

*"Children are our future, & as an overall 'deprived area', schools & children need as much support as possible."*

*"Schools need to be prioritized to give children the best possible chance."*

*"Schools need more support as they are fighting a losing battle regarding behavior and the ALN children."*

*"you cannot sacrifice the opportunity for a child to have the chance of a good education and future job/carer prospects"*

All of the young people we spoke to agreed with the additional funding for schools.

- 4.11 Many comments were received that supported an increase in the school budget, however some respondents felt that the increase should be in line with the proposed Council Tax increase (4.9%) or the provisional settlement figure from Welsh Government (2.8%).

**Lower school budget increase**

*“4.9% should be allocated”*

*“School budgets increases should be lower to recognise that other services e.g. should also be protected. Schools should not expect to be protected year on year and should share the pain of reduced budgets.”*

*“I agree that schools budget should be protected but not to the detriment of other services, which by giving a 6.4 % increase will inevitably happen”*

*“If Welsh Government is increasing by 2.8% that is all it should be increased by. If you just manage and subsidise, then you will never get a fair settlement from WAG. Robbing Peter to Pay Paul isn't a good strategy.....”*

- 4.12 A number of comments received were in favour of a budget increase for schools, but wanted more information on how the money would be invested.

**Other ideas**

*“Again, more understanding of why the budget needs increasing by this amount and further to this how exactly will the funds be used.”*

*“Depends on how the money is going to be used”*

*“Depends on what the increase will be spent on. I would rather see school transport still being provided and ensuring children are attending school especially the most vulnerable instead of for example providing stationary/books”*

*“Education of children is important to ensure a bright future for the county but this must not come at a significant cost to parents and taxpayers. Having good education is pointless if the families of those pupils are in poverty.”*

*“Needs to be specific investment with clear and measurable outputs”*

*“Schools aren't the only services you provide.”*

- 4.13 Some respondents felt that they couldn't comment on the schools budget due to them not having children and so were not affected, however

others felt it was unfair for them to contribute to the budget because they had no use for schools.

**Not applicable - not directly affected**

*“Consistent increases in council tax to fund consistent increases in school budget is unfair for residents who have no use for the schools service. I agree that paying for essential schools budget is necessary but not if this is to help fund school services which are non essential”*

*“Doesn't apply to me, have no children”*

*“I don't have children so this would be unfair for me to judge”*

- 4.14 There were some concerns about increasing schools budget at the expense of other services and the need for schools to also look at efficiencies themselves.

**School efficiencies**

*“Schools should be tasked to look at their own budgets & make efficiencies where possible.”*

*“Schools have been protected for many years. It's time to carry out a review of service provision to see if there are potential savings.”*

*“A blanket increase may not be the right approach if schools are individually mis-managing budgets. If the fiscal governance of schools is tight, and every effort is made for correct management, then yes, a budget increase in line with inflation is appropriate.”*

*“Although there is an increase, schools are also being asked to make a 1.3% “efficiency saving” (essentially a cut)! I feel this should be accurately reported and mentioned alongside the proposed increase. Additionally, many of the schools' traded services costs are being hugely increased. Just saying the budget going up doesn't give a true reflection of the dire picture schools are facing.”*

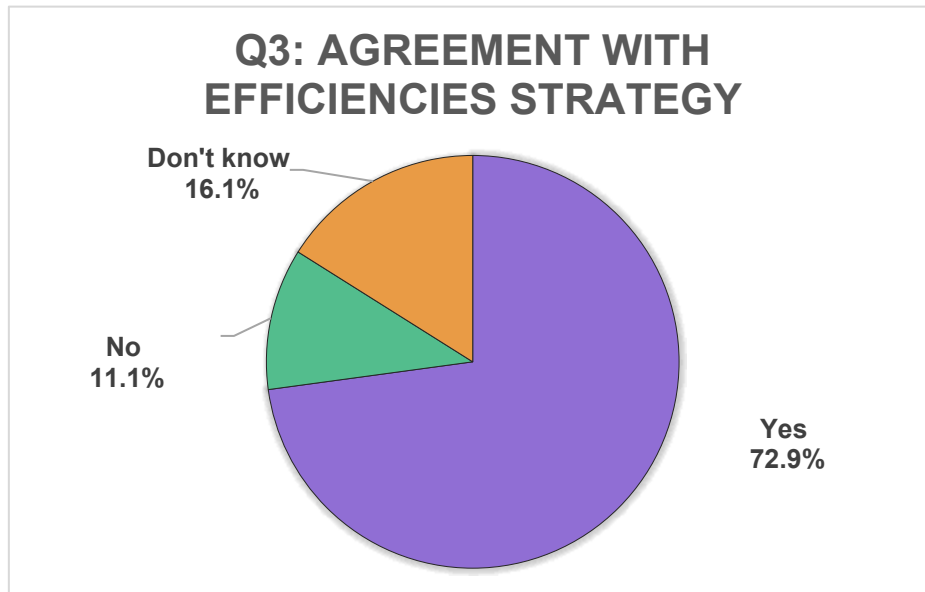
*“I know people who work in schools and so much money is wasted. Instead of increasing by that much I feel like budgets should be managed in a much more appropriate way.”*

- 4.15 The OPAG agreed with the approach outlined for the schools budget.

**Efficiencies**

- 4.16 Significant work has been undertaken across all Council Services and budget reduction measures totalling £13 million for 2024-25 have been identified which can be delivered without significantly impacting on our front-line services.

72.9% of respondents agreed that the Council should continue to maximise efficiency and pursue these efficiency savings for next year.



		Number	%
<b>Q3 - Efficiencies</b>	Yes	322	72.9%
	No	49	11.1%
	Don't know	71	16.1%
	Total	442	

Figure 4 – Efficiencies

4.17 Many of the responses were in agreement with the need for efficiencies:

*"Yes, I agree to efficiencies, but what does 'without significantly impacting' actually mean?"*

*"Funds have to be used efficiently so yes, we all have to do our bit but it's hard to watch the quality of life deteriorate in the area."*

*"Maximizing efficiency! Yes, get on with it....."*

**Staffing and Efficiency:**

4.18 Some of the comments on this proposal noted that efficiencies should not be found at the expense of staffing levels or support to frontline services.

*"Your idea of efficiency seems to be cutting staff."*

*"Frontline services are negatively impacted by every single unfilled vacancy and overworked staff member."*

*"Efficiency is important but this must not come at the detriment of services or council employees."*

- 4.19 A number of suggestions for efficiencies and savings were made in the comments, including:

*"Make WFH more accessible managed during the pandemic why not now? If productivity is a concern managers need to be stronger."*

*"You need to listen to and engage with the staff on the ground in relation to the efficiencies that are achievable while providing the service required."*

*"Stop wasting money on street speed limit signs and remote funding for Welsh language, all very nice to have in a world where funding is there."*

*"Stop cutting grass it is not good for biodiversity."*

*"An easy way to save money is a strict work from home policy."*

*"Stop the unnecessary office moves and relocations. Stop leasing property when we have Council owned property laying empty."*

*"Savings should be made where possible, however, money should be spent where the public safety is at risk."*

*"If you're maximizing efficiencies and you've found savings why can these not be used instead of increasing council tax and increasing schooling budget."*

*"As long as efficiency doesn't come at a cost to safeguarding children such as school transport and social services provision."*

Some comments from our school consultation included:

*"Road works – spending money on roads that don't need to be fixed."*

*"20 mph areas are a waste of money to change signs only to change them back to 30mph."*

*"Lots of cars speeding in my street and nothing stops them. More cameras are needed or speed bumps in areas where needed."*

- 4.20 A number of comments called for cuts to managers and Councillors:

*"You need to take away from the top first, too many chiefs."*

*"Cut the number of highly paid members of management."*

## **Fees and Charges**

- 4.21 The Council reviews the level of fees and charges on an annual basis in the context of the rate of inflation. The current level of inflation (Consumer Prices Index to December 2023) is 4.0%, however it has been well above 5% for the majority of the past 12 months.

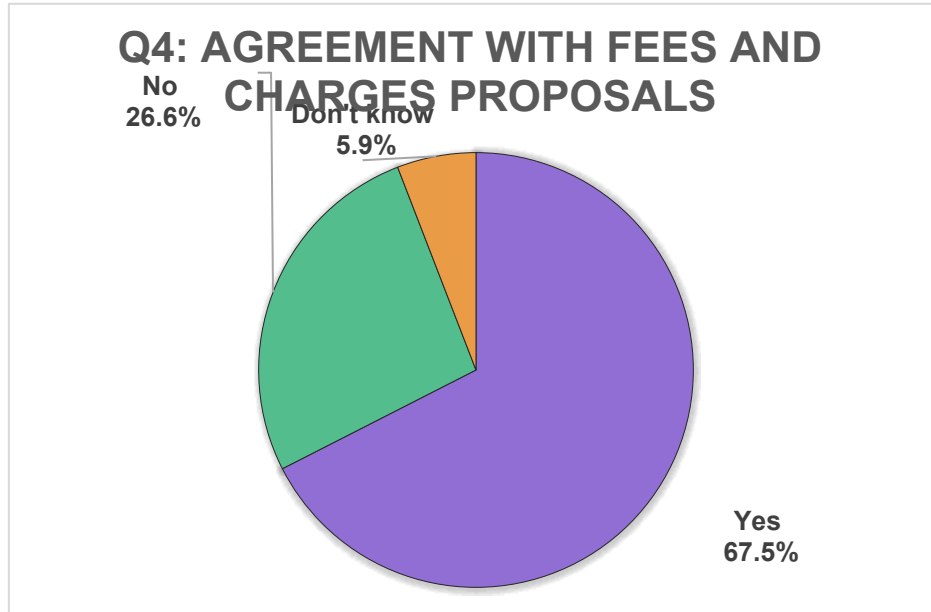
Phase 1 of the Council's 2024/25 Budget Consultation process set out that an across-the-board increase for all fees and charges is not considered reasonable, with the need for fees and charges to be reviewed individually having regard to service user impact.

It is proposed that for the year ahead, the general rate of increase across our fees and charges is set at 5% with the Council absorbing the implications of not applying an uplift in line with inflation. A number of areas are proposed to be subject to specific changes, as shown in the table below:

<b>Area of Charge</b>	<b>Proposed Specific Changes</b>
Car Park Charges	Season tickets/residential parking permits – Freeze Short stay/long stay up to 4 hours £0.10 increase and a £0.20 increase over 4 hours  With the additional income generated used to off-set increased transaction costs incurred by the Council where card payments are made to purchase car park tickets*
School Meals (Secondary Schools)	£0.15 per meal
Leisure for Life – Membership / Pay and Play	Membership +£0.50 (with further proposals set out in the full Fees and Charges Review)
Rhondda Heritage Park	£9.95 to £10.95 Adult Entry (with further proposals set out in the full Fees and Charges Review)
Lido (Pontypridd)	Standard admission charge / cold water swim / paid activities - freeze Children under 16 – remain free Boxing day swim: +£0.50 Introduction of a £0.25 booking fee per individual ticket purchased to help reduce the number of pre-bookings that do not result in attendance
Community Meals (meals on wheels) & Day Services meals	Increase of £0.25
Non-residential care services	Home care Hourly Rate: £20.00 to £21.00 per hour Day Centre Services daily rate: from £20.00 to £21.00 per day Direct Payment hourly rate: £10.00 to £11.00 p hour
Bulky Waste Collection	From £17.00 to £20 (for 3 items)

\* Car Park Charges – tickets machines being upgraded to enable card payments to be taken (payment by cash option to also remain in place)

4.22 All of these changes would generate additional income of £407k per year. 67.5% of respondents agreed with the proposals for fees and charges.



		Number	%
<b>Q4 - Fees and Charges</b>	Yes	299	67.5%
	No	118	26.6%
	Don't know	26	5.9%
	Total	443	

Figure 5 – Fees and Charges

4.23 Overall there were a wide range of comments on all the areas of fees and charges proposals, based on services used and people’s understanding of each of the services.

There was some general agreement with the overall approach:

**General agreement**

*“I agree with all the proposed fee changes, although Car Park chargers should increase by 20p and 30p (not 10p and 20p). Lido fees should also increase by more than the proposed amount.”*

*“Absolutely. These are sensible increases that won’t impact too heavily”*

*“I believe some of these charges could be increased a little more considering past years increases compared to inflation rates.”*

*“If these are being used then the user's should have to pay the increase”*

*“on the whole I agree these are good services and the cost is acceptable”*

*“One or two points could be argued however in the main I'd support the increases as a whole.”*

*“Seems a reasonable approach in the circumstances”*

- 4.24 Generally speaking, the majority of comments received were not in favour of the proposed increases to fees and charges, and there was concern for the local economy and businesses;

### **Disagreement**

*“Increases in fees could negatively impact the local economy and small businesses.”*

*“Stop raising prices and giving us nothing in return!”*

*“Without transparency of how the funds are saved, it feels like an inflationary hit without any benefit.”*

*“Disagree with any increases along with my council tax increase. We need more given back, not extra charges.”*

*“I am unsure what to make of this. The increasing prices more and more in a cost of living crisis is set to take advantage of people that are majorly affected by these increases (usually low/no income households)”*

*“People are already putting themselves in debt to deal with the increases we are facing year after year”*

- 4.25 There were also concerns that some of the increases could have an impact on potentially vulnerable residents, particularly with regards to meal provision;

### **Impact on Vulnerable Populations:**

*“Meals young and old increasing, vulnerable people will skip meals.”*

*“No increase on care or meals on wheels as people who use these services already struggling.”*

*“These are hitting the most vulnerable in society.”*

*“The cost for non residential day services is too expensive. People will be excluded and become more isolated.”*

*“The main one I do not agree with is the increase to the residential services and meals on wheels. Again focused on the lowest earners.”*



*Maybe place some fees on landlord portfolio owners, 2nd 3rd 4th homes instead. Those who can afford it. Not Mrs Jones on a state pension caring for her husband struggling to heat her home."*

*"All except care charges. These are not fair in anyway. These are our most vulnerable people and the charge is more than most can afford"*

*"Some yes and some no comprehensive school meals are already expensive."*

A respondent from our school consultation commented *"I don't like the day centre increases."*

- 4.26 The following areas received the most comments on fees and charges and a selection of those comments are provided.
- 4.27 The Lido was seen as an area where prices could be increased due to the service being seen as a luxury.

### **Lido Charge**

*"Lido prices should be increased."*

*"Lido should not be free unless family is on low income, many can afford to pay £3 per swim or £10 family of 4 pass - and if on free school means can go in free and keep a register. That way you'll encourage more families to apply for Free School Meals as many dont."*

*"Increase Lido booking fee"*

*"Pre-booking fee on the lido should be much higher. Demand far outstrips supply and as the rates are so low, people make several bookings and do not think about others if they simply fail to use their allocated slot."*

*"Children are free to the lido which although very nice and may encourage exercise is a luxury not a necessity."*

- 4.28 Parking had a mixture of comments with some respondents suggesting it was cheap and charges could potentially be increased, whereas others expressed the opposite opinion;

### **Parking**

*"Parking is so cheap I would rather increase that than school meals or meals o. Wheels the the elderly and children it seems disproportionate"*

*"Charging for parking is killing the town centres."*

*"Upgrade to parking machines will be very welcomed."*

*"It is unfair for residents who don't own a vehicle to cushion this."*

*"Councils wonder why town centres are dead, increasing parking charges only facilitates this. There aren't enough chain shops in towns to want to pay for parking when you can go to a retail park with no parking charges and do much more shopping than in a town centre. Also switching to card payments only is alienating a generation who pay cash. We are not a cashless society and we should not be forced into this."*

*"I believe that car parking could be increased."*

*"I do feel that parking charges could be increased more than this though."*

*"I think all public car parks in RCT should be free for the first 4 hours to encourage footfall in town centres"*

- 4.29 The general opinion on school meals was for them to stay as they currently are, with no increase. They were mostly seen as a necessity and not a luxury.

### **School meals**

*"School meal prices should increase by up to 50p."*

*"Increase in school meals by 20p"*

*"School meal cost should be supplemented to ensure every child gets a hot meal."*

*"What justifies the increase in school dinner costs? The standard of the food is not getting better but yet you want to charge more. Also, the portions in a secondary school are not always satisfactory for an almost adult for lunch."*

*"School meals are not a luxury they are necessity, the small ones who don't cost as much to feed are free whereas the teens are not."*

- 4.30 The young people we consulted disagreed with the proposals to increase the prices of school meals.

*"£2.95 increasing to £3.10... my friend can only buy one item with her allowance. If you have something for breakfast, you don't have enough for lunch. The pizza slices are too expensive."*

*"When I was in year 7, drinks were cheaper. Cans were 70p and now they're £1+."*

*"Lunch is sometimes the only hot meal some young people have in the day."*

- 4.31 There was concern that there was the potential for increased fly tipping with the proposal to increase the bulky waste charges.

### **Bulky Waste**

*"Charging for bulky waste collection has caused so much fly tipping."*

*"The increase in bulky waste collection will lead to more fly tipping."*

*"Charging for bulky waste collection prices are extortionate."*

*"Don't agree - Bulky Waste Collection, Non-residential care services; School Meals (Secondary Schools)."*

A young person commented *"Bulky waste increase isn't fair."*

- 4.32 With gym membership, the majority of comments received suggested that exercise benefitted a lot of people and was important for mental health therefore should not be increased.

*"fitness activity's going up could result with more pressure o NHS budgets if people stop keeping fit."*

*"Leisure for life should not be increased as it may deter people from using facilities which benefit their health."*

*"I go to Llantrisant Gym and the prices are already so high, it needs to be lowered. The general demographic earns less than Cardiff and the Vale and yet our gyms are much higher in price."*

*"Why will the lido fees remain frozen and hun membership increase when teenagers and younger people are more interested and invested in going to the gym rather than swimming....long term will have a positive impact ie less people using nhs ect"*

- 4.33 Some comments were received in relation to the Heritage park;

*"Consider reduced charges for OAP and the Disabled at the Rhondda HERITAGE PARK."*

*"Some suggestions here are totally fine however I believe the impact of increasing prices through psychological price barriers may impact takings negatively. Eg. A couple last year could go to the heritage park with a £20 note, now they can't, they could go somewhere else for roughly the same cost."*

*“educational places like the heritage park going up? where is the incentive for family's to take their children and educate them on our past history of wales.”*

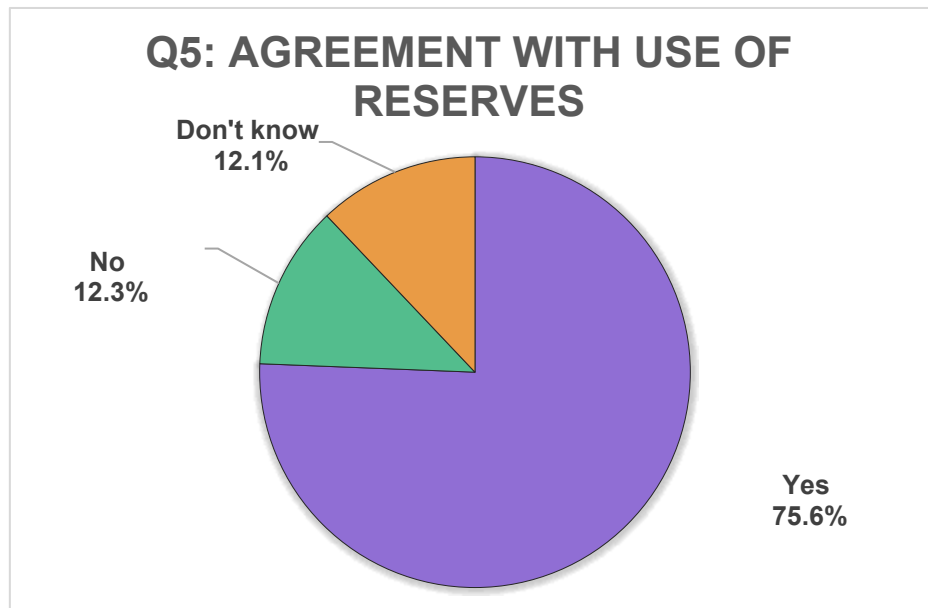
- 4.34 The OPAG noted increases in fees and charges are expected and were generally happy with the rises if they kept Council Tax levels down. They did feel that the £0.25 booking fee for Lido tickets was too low and unlikely to address people booking and not turning up. All members felt it should be higher.

**Use of Reserves (Transition Funding)**

- 4.35 We have for many years used our reserves (transition funding) 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.

The Council is proposing to use £8.95 million of reserves (transition funding) to balance the budget for next year.

75.6% of respondents agreed with the proposal to use the Council’s reserves in this way.



		Number	%
<b>Q5 - Use of Reserves</b>	Yes	332	75.6%
	No	54	12.3%
	Don't know	53	12.1%
	Total	439	

Figure 6 – Use of Reserves

- 4.36 A number of respondents were happy with the proposed use of reserves and the way the Council manages them;

*“Again RCT has effectively used reserves over a number of years”*

*“as long as it doesn’t compromise the stability of the council”*

*“income is never guaranteed so would not use as this cushion only as emergency for risk/health and safety”*

*“Effective use of reserves is to be encouraged, as long as there is enough held back to cover emergencies such as fire and flooding.”*

*“It is important that the council looks to use reserves before asking taxpayers to contribute towards higher council tax but less services.”*

- 4.37 There was some confusion about the levels of reserves held by the Council and more information was needed by some.

*“cannot make an informed response based on the information provided”*

*“This is too vague, what percentage of the reserves is £8.95m? How quickly can it be replenished.....”*

*“. . . there is no right answer to this question. We would also need to understand the impact of using it or not.”*

- 4.38 The OPAG commented on the importance of reserves within the Council and agreed with the proposed use of the Council reserves as outlined.

### **Other Comments**

- 4.39 A wide range of general comments were received regarding the budget. Some of the most frequent themes are described below, with relevant quotes.

### **Appreciation of the current financial situation**

*“Only that I appreciate how difficult it must be for RCT to juggle things about considering the short fall from Govt.”*

*“Think I have covered it all. I know have criticised but I also appreciate how difficult these decisions must be. Please put school children’s needs first”*

*“Seems fair in what is a tough time all round”*

*“Strategy reasonable in the circumstances. Could considering raising extra revenue, suggestion: local lottery, staging fund raising events”*

*“The strategy seems a balanced approach to deal with increasing financial constraints. I would just emphasise that a cost reduction without detriment to the provision of a required service is an efficiency saving. A*

*cost reduction that has a detrimental effect on a required service is not an efficiency saving. It is a cut."*

### **Cost of living/Affordability**

*"I am concerned about people on low incomes: proposed increases may be readily affordable for those on higher incomes, but some people are already struggling to make ends meet - I don't know how they will cope with even small increases."*

*"In our area, where even working people can't afford basic living necessities, how are the increases going to be paid however justified they are. ?"*

*"I feel that saving jobs should be a priority. In this current climate losing a job could be extremely damaging to not only finances but Health."*

*"More needs to be done for Pensioner's, Vulnerable and lonely people at a lower cost."*

### **Councillor and Management Costs**

*"lower the level of middle management - who are doing nothing for their Wages"*

*"Find additional savings within the Council bureaucracy"*

*"Look at staffing to cut costs. Do we need as many councillors and their costs?"*

### **Service Investment**

*"I would like to see the health and social care services increased as this has had a significant impact on our family and that of our community members. Delays in services has had a significant impact on our wellbeing."*

*"Roads must be a priority. Public transport is non existent or unusable in many areas. We must spend on our roads to encourage development and jobs. This means prioritising repairs urgently needed"*

*"Prioritise health, safety and education"*

### **Income Generation/Suggestions**

*"council are missing out on income on litter dropping /cigarettes butts especially"*

*"parking permit wardens are non-existent in my area (Aberdare) many illegal parking situations going un-fined."*

*“Increase hire charges for council facilities”.*

*“Looks good. One comment, why not use local community groups to help council operatives for some general purpose use. For example litter picking ,informing on general deuteriation in council areas, playing fields etc.”*

**Savings/Efficiencies**

*“.....RCT has a vast array of Solar panels that could feed directly into the grid to increase the funds entering the council”*

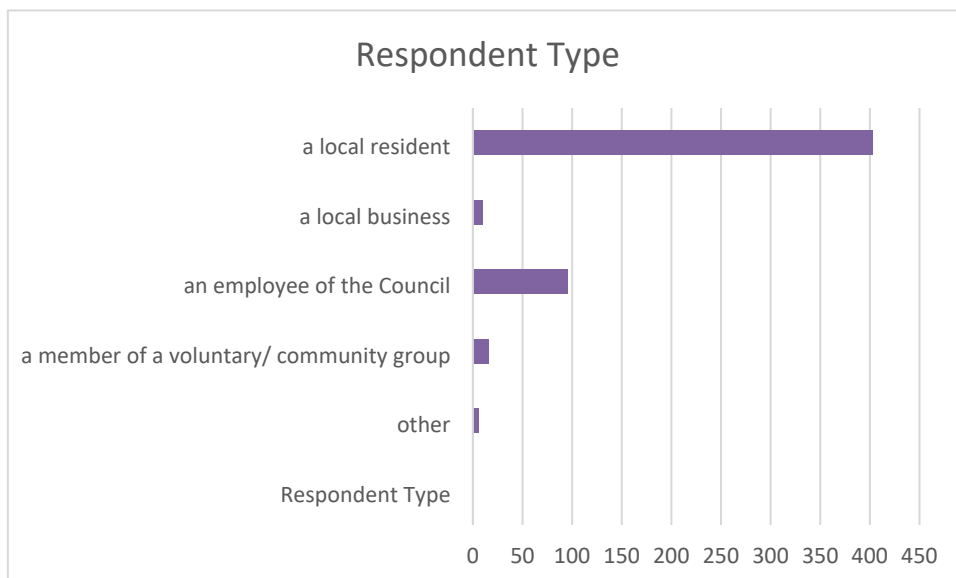
*“I think the council need to look at the wastage in every department”*

*“An easy way to save money is a strict work from home policy. This would massively reduce the cost of heating and electricity paid for by the council.”*

*“Reduce the 2 day in office to 1 day. This could potentially reduce heating costs and possible the closure and selling of buildings”*

**About You**

4.40 The majority of respondents to the survey were residents (89.6%, or 403 people). Respondents were asked to select all labels that applied to them: 21.1% (95) stated they were employees of the Council, 3.6% (16) were members of a voluntary or community group, 2.2% (10) were a local business and 1.3% (6) selected “Other”.



Note: This was a multiple response question.

**Figure 7 – Respondent Type**

4.41 Under the Equality Act 2010 and the Public Sector Equality Duties, the Council has a legal duty to look at how its decisions impact on people because they may have particular characteristics. Respondents were asked how the proposals affect them because of:

1. Gender
2. Age
3. Ethnicity
4. Disability
5. Sexuality
6. Religion / belief
7. Gender identity
8. Relationship status
9. Pregnancy
10. Preferred language

4.42 The most frequent theme in the comments was age, with a number of respondents expressing concern over the cost of living. Single-adult families facing rising costs were also mentioned in a number of comments.

The following are a selection of the comments received;

### **Age**

*“Age : restricted income on a pension”*

*“AGE More robust investment in social care as this are is suffering the most , patients not having care packages and needs assessment on discharge from hospital and having to rely on family to meet these needs .this is not acceptable and is putting pressure on families . without investment and recruitment this area will collapse and the aging population will suffer”*

*“As I think about retirement I increasingly think about what I need as an older person and how the Council supports the community I live in to meet my needs and ensure a happy, active and healthy old age, that does not require me to be stuck in the house 24/7. I want to be part of a community that has lots going on and activities I can enjoy.”*

*“Age - Being a mum of a young family and a carer to disabled peoples, any increase causes concern for us when things feel tight as it is.”*

### **Disability**

*“Those with a disability will be impacted. People below the standard level of equality are always negatively impacted when money is taken out of the system”*



**Gender**

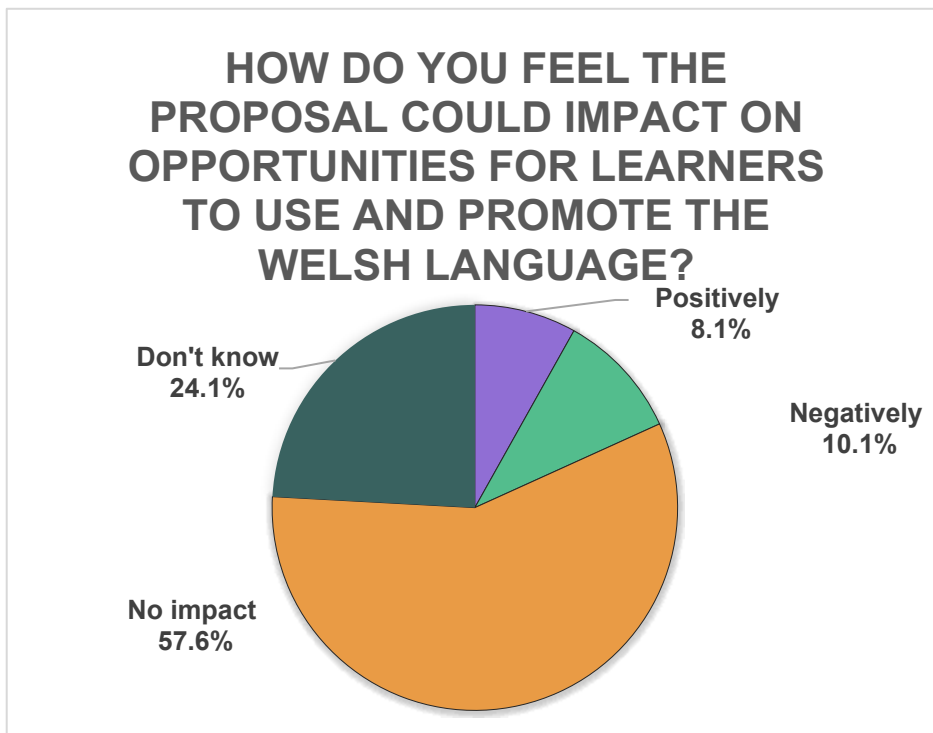
*“Sex/gender - traditional females role as a caregiver (as well as working) means an increase in food expenditure for the children at school. This increased costs as well as the council tax would significantly impact us.”*

*“as a mother of two children who has to work part time as I cannot afford childcare, a rise in council tax will crucify me.”*

**General**

*“Cost of living so it would affect every household”*

4.43 Under the Welsh Language Measure (2011) and the Welsh Language Standards (No.1) Regulations 2015, the Council has a legal duty to consider how its decisions impact upon the Welsh language. Respondents were asked how they felt the proposal could impact on opportunities for learners to use and promote the Welsh Language.



	Number	%	
<b>How do you feel the proposal could impact on opportunities for learners to use and promote the Welsh Language?</b>	Positively	33	8.1%
	Negatively	41	10.1%
	No impact	234	57.6%
	Don't know	98	24.1%
	Total	406	

Figure 8 – Impact on Welsh Language learners

4.44 Respondents were asked how could positive effects be increased, or negative effects be decreased?

The following are a selection of the comments received, the majority not directly related to the question, but comments around the costs of the Welsh language on the Council and potential savings.

*“Bills & telephone enquiries should be in English not Welsh. Everyone speaks & reads English!!”*

*“Savings could be made by asking people their language preference and where paper correspondence is required...”*

*“Get rid of funding spends on Welsh language, business will still done and money will be saved.”*

*“I agree with providing opportunities for all those who wish to speak Welsh and learn Welsh, but stop wasting money making everything bilingual when you are conversing with someone who has enquired in English and is their chosen language.”*

*“I think the Welsh language is the last thing you should be worrying about when people are struggling to heat their homes and put food on the table.”*

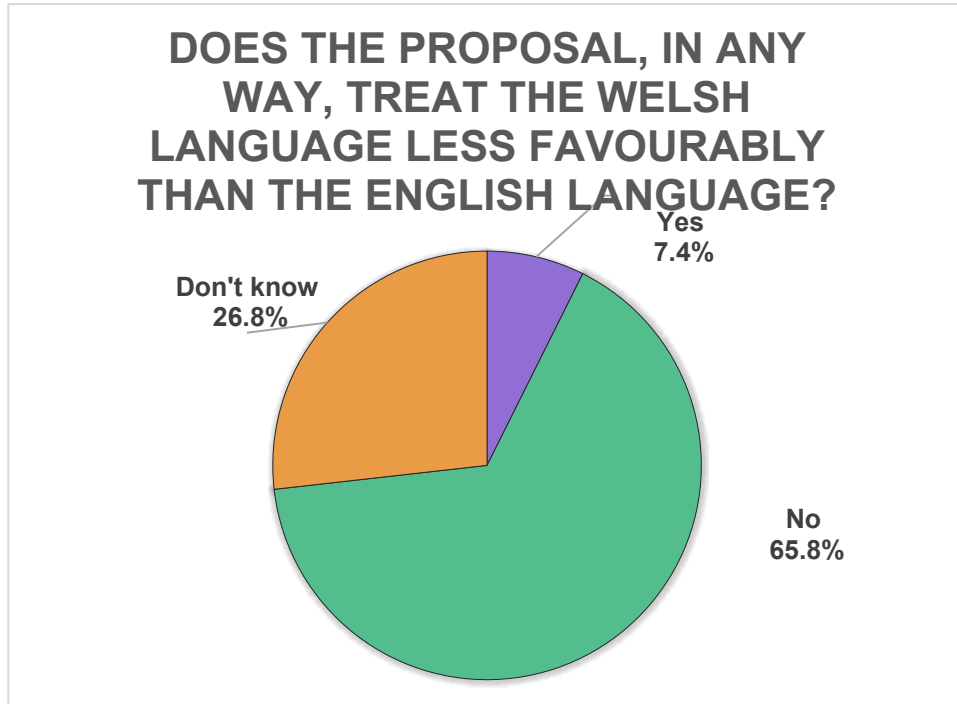
There were a number of positive responses;

*“More chances to learn the Welsh medium through official means. Possible discounts and promotions of Welsh learning services to dispel the harmful perception of the Welsh language being a ‘dead language’.”*

*“more Welsh language recruitment in as many areas as possible to help sustain the use of Welsh in the work place”*

*“Starting Welsh teaching at a higher level in primary school”.*

4.45 Respondents were asked if the proposal, in any way, treated the Welsh Language less favourably than the English Language.



	Number	%
<b>Does the proposal, in any way, treat the Welsh Language less favourably than the English language?</b>	Yes	30 7.4%
	No	268 65.8%
	Don't know	109 26.8%
	Total	407

Figure 9 – Welsh Language

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**PHASE 2 BUDGET CONSULTATION (2024/25)**  
**(EXTRACT OF DRAFT MINUTES – SUBJECT TO APPROVAL BY THE  
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE)**

**RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNCIL OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY 2022-2027 COMMITTEE**  
Minutes of the virtual meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny 2022-2027 Committee held on  
Monday, 29 January 2024 at 5.00 pm

**County Borough Councillors – The following Overview and Scrutiny 2022-2027  
Committee Councillors were present online:**

Councillor J Edwards (Chair)

Councillor B Stephens	Councillor M Ashford
Councillor R Bevan	Councillor J Bonetto
Councillor R Davis	Councillor Sheryl Evans
Councillor Sera Evans	Councillor S Morgans
Councillor G L Warren	Councillor M Powell
Councillor S Emanuel	

**Co-Opted Members in attendance:-**

Mr M Veale

**Officers in attendance:-**

Mr P Mee, Chief Executive  
Mr P Griffiths, Service Director, Finance and Improvement Services  
Mr C Hanagan, Service Director Democratic Services and Communications  
Mrs S Daniel, Principal Democratic Services Officer  
Ms L Lawson, Performance Manager

**Apologies for absence**

Councillor K Morgan  
Councillor C Middle

**Extract from the minutes**

**Budget Consultation 2024-25 (Phase 2)**

The Service Director Democratic Services and Communications presented the report to Members to be consulted on and for the Committee to formally respond to the second phase of the Council's 2024-25 Budget Consultation.

The Service Director advised that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee is requested to pre-scrutinise the draft 2024/25 Revenue Budget Strategy, as part of the second phase of the 2024-25 Budget Consultation process.

The Service Director Finance and Improvement Services then gave a presentation to Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and covered the following areas: Introduction – 2024/25 Draft Revenue Budget Strategy; The Council's Current Financial Position (2023/24); Phase 1 Budget Consultation – Headlines; Provisional Local Government Settlement 2024/25 – Headlines/Implications for Rhondda Cynon Taf; Cabinet Proposed Budget Strategy 2024/25; and Next steps and key dates.

A Member was pleased to see that 63% of respondents to the phase 1 budget consultation process fed back that the Council should continue with its strategy on reserves, recognising that reserves cannot be used every year without being replenished.

A Member fed back that the number of responses to the first phase of the consultation seemed disproportionate in comparison to the number of people living in Rhondda Cynon Taf and asked if there was an opportunity to learn from this and use different engagement strategies.

The Service Director Finance and Improvement Services indicated that the Council considers its arrangements on an ongoing basis to learn lessons, with a comprehensive approach to engagement in place that includes face-to-face events in town centre locations, engagement with third sector partners and schools, and also through the use of social media.

A Member asked if the Council are doing enough to educate people on the work of the Council, so they can better understand its finances, how funds are spent and its different functions.

The Service Director Finance and Improvement Services fed back that the Council aims to make available information to aid residents' understanding of the Council's finances and where it spends public money, and provided examples in the form of an easy read guide produced for budget consultation purposes; a leaflet included within Council Tax notices to residents that provides a breakdown on the Council's budget and how it is spent and also how the Council is funded; and engaging directly with school-based learners through consultation processes. The Service Director Democratic Services and Communications added that the number of consultees referenced in the presentation does not reflect on-going communication activity the Council undertakes via its social media channels and noted that a number of separate public consultation processes have also been undertaken in recent months linked to the budget setting process that have received high levels of engagement from the public.

A Member asked if demographic information in relation to individuals responding to the budget consultation was available to analyse. The Service Director Finance and Improvement Services fed back that this information is captured and can be used to inform on-going consultation arrangements.

A Member of the Committee commented that whilst increasing Council Tax is never popular and is a decision that is not taken lightly, the Council also need to

ensure the necessary funding is in place to provide a wide range of vital services to our residents.

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**SCHOOL BUDGET FORUM MEETING – 25<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY 2024**

**THE COUNCIL'S DRAFT 2024/25 REVENUE BUDGET STRATEGY – PHASE 2  
CONSULTATION**

**Extract from the minutes**

**BUDGET CONSULTATION 2024/25 (PHASE 2)**

With the aid of a PowerPoint Presentation, the Service Director – Finance and Improvement Services provided Members with an update in respect of the Council's Budget Consultation 2024/25 and covered the following areas: Introduction – 2024/25 Draft Revenue Budget Strategy; The Council's Current Financial Position (2023/24); Phase 1 Budget Consultation – Headlines; Provisional Local Government Settlement 2024/25 – Headlines/Implications for Rhondda Cynon Taf; Cabinet Proposed Budget Strategy 2024/25; and Next steps and key dates.

Following the overview by the Service Director, Forum Members were informed that their feedback would be considered by Cabinet, alongside feedback received from all other stakeholders, as part of Cabinet meeting later in February 2024 to finalise its recommended Budget Strategy. As part of the overview, Forum Members were advised that the Leader of the Council, Councillor Morgan, has requested officers to explore additional one-off funding opportunities to be allocated to schools for the 2024/25 financial year, this being over and above the proposed school funding set out in the draft 2024/25 Budget Strategy.

Following this, Forum Members had the opportunity to ask questions. The Deputy Leader noted the difficulties presented by the on-going need to identify and deliver budget savings and emphasised that as a Council we are proud of our schools and will continue to provide support for education. The Deputy Leader also fed back that in the context of the very challenging financial outlook, the proposed Council Tax increase was fair; efficiency saving opportunities have once again been maximised and where service operational reconfigurations have been identified, these do not have a significant detrimental impact on frontline services; and the Council has a proven track record over many years of using its reserves sensibly to support the setting of balanced budgets. Forum Members did not feedback any further comments based on the position set out by the Council's Deputy Leader.

The Chair also fed back that at yesterday's Cabinet meeting, additional recommendations were agreed to amend the 'continuation of free breakfast club provision in primary and special schools with the introduction of a charge for the additional childcare element' proposal based on the public consultation feedback received, namely, to provide the additional option to access the provision for up to 3 days per week at £40 per term and a further category of concession whereby parents/carers would only pay for the first two children of primary age, living in the same household, accessing the provision. It was emphasised that the Council would

work in partnership with Schools as part of implementation arrangements, with the additional income generated ring-fenced and re-invested back into school budgets. In respect of the changes to Breakfast Club provision, a Forum Member noted that it will be a challenge logistically and raised concern around the possibility of increased workload for Headteachers. In respect of 2024/25 school budget information, the Forum Member queried when this would be communicated to schools. The Director of Education and Inclusion Services advised that in respect of free Breakfast Club and additional childcare provision, the team will make arrangements to progress implementation, subject to confirmation of the decision, and would include an on-line facility for parents / carers to make payments to ensure the process is as efficient as possible. In respect of school budget information, the Service Director – Finance & Improvement Services confirmed that information will be provided to schools as timely as possible, in line with agreed processes.

Discussions continued and a Forum Member queried whether efficiency savings would be included within the school budget formula. The Forum Member also noted that Schools have utilised reserves as part of budget setting for a number of years and could now be facing a deficit. The Member further queried if clarification could be provided on the funding of redundancies. The Service Director – Finance and Improvement Services advised that in respect of efficiency savings, the Council will ensure transparency as part of the school budget formula, and in respect of funding of redundancies it was fed back that internal discussions are currently on-going.

Discussions ensued and a Member queried if teacher salaries would be fully funded. The Service Director – Finance and Improvement Services confirmed this was the case. Another Forum Member queried the new grants system and the Service Director, Finance Services advised that families continue to be encouraged to apply for Free School Meal status to ensure they are eligible for Schools Essentials Grant. Discussion continued and a Forum Member emphasised that the issue with the grant is that it is dependent on parents applying. The Service Director advised that the team are currently working on a social media campaign to encourage parents to apply. The Chair acknowledged the concerns of Forum Members in respect of parents applying and advised that this has also been raised directly with the Welsh Government.

The Service Director – Finance Services added that in respect of the grant that replaces EIG, Welsh Government has committed to providing allocations by next week, with the requirement for the information to then be validated by local authority officers before distributing to schools.

Following discussion, the Service Director– Finance and Improvement Services thanked Forum Members for their time and feedback and advised on next steps and key dates.

The meeting closed at 3.09 pm.

Councillor R Lewis, Chair

**RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNCIL JOINT CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE**

Minutes of the virtual meeting of the Joint Consultative Committee meeting held on Monday, 5 February 2024 at 12.00 pm (draft, subject to approval)

**County Borough Councillors - Joint Consultative Committee Members in attendance:-**

Councillor M Webber (Chair)

Councillor A Morgan

Councillor A Crimmings

**Trade Union Members in Attendance**

Mr P Crews (Unison)

Mr C Jones (GMB)

Ms L Davies (Unite)

Mr A McCarthy (Unite)

**Officers in attendance**

Mr R Evans, Director of Human Resources

Mr P Griffiths, Service Director – Finance & Improvement Services

**7 DECLARATION OF INTEREST**

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

**8 APOLOGY**

An apology for absence was received from County Borough Councillor G Caple.

**9 MINUTES**

**RESOLVED** to approve the minutes of the 20<sup>th</sup> December 2023 as an accurate reflection of the meeting.

**10 BUDGET CONSULTATION 2024/25 (PHASE 2)**

The Service Director Finance and Improvement Services presented the report to Members which provided the Committee the opportunity to formally respond to the second phase of the Council's 2024-25 Budget Consultation.

The Service Director Finance and Improvement Services then gave a presentation to Members of the Committee and covered the following areas: Introduction – 2024/25 Draft Revenue Budget Strategy; The Council's Current Financial Position (2023/24); Phase 1 Budget Consultation – Headlines; and Provisional Local Government Settlement 2024/25 – Headlines/Implications for Rhondda Cynon Taf.

Before continuing to cover the remaining element of the presentation in respect of the Cabinet Proposed Budget Strategy 2024/25 and Next steps and key dates, the Chair fed back the implications of needing to deliver significant budget savings year-on-year and the very difficult financial outlook all local authorities across Wales are facing. The Chair noted that 75.6% of respondents to the phase 1 consultation fed back that a reasonable increase in Council Tax to contribute to closing the budget gap was preferable.

The Leader of the Council, Councillor A Morgan, commented on the Council's proposed Council Tax level that is being consulted upon, advising that the proposed 4.9% was at the lower end of the spectrum in comparison to council tax levels being proposed by other Welsh Local Authorities. Councillor Morgan also commented on the importance of setting a Council Tax level that took into account residents' ability to pay and recognising that income from council tax is an important funding source to the Council to support service delivery.

Councillor Morgan continued by referencing the significant level of efficiency savings that have once again been identified and built into the proposed budget strategy alongside a much smaller level of service changes that are deemed necessary due to funding levels being well below that needed to address budget pressures facing the Council. Councillor Morgan added that should the local authority funding position improve in the medium to long term, opportunity is available for service changes that will be implemented in 2024/25 to be revisited.

The Service Director continued the presentation by outlining the detail of Cabinet's proposed Budget Strategy and welcomed feedback and comments from members of the Committee.

The importance of communication was highlighted, with Members commenting on the usefulness of the information within Council Tax notices, explaining how Council Tax income is utilised, and it was agreed that this information would be shared, when available, with Trade Union colleagues.

The Chair provided comment on a number of areas proposed within the budget strategy and specifically referenced the Council's on-going commitment to its successful Apprenticeship and Graduate schemes, with posts being funded by individual service areas, and the introduction of a booking fee in respect of the Lido Pontypridd, noting the rationale for the proposed fee and that prices would remain competitive for users.

Mr P Crews (Unison) commented on the reduction in the Social Care Workforce Grant announced by Welsh Government, indicating the need to inform Welsh Government of the impact the reduction in funding would have on the Council. In addition, clarity was requested on the future

funding arrangements for the Graduate and Apprenticeship schemes, referring to this being met by individual service areas, and what monitoring would be in place to ensure the continued success and momentum of these schemes.

Councillor Morgan fed back that monitoring arrangements for both schemes are in place via the Senior Leadership Team, with updates provided to himself and the Deputy Leader for consideration. Councillor Morgan also highlighted the on-going importance of the Council 'growing its own talent' through these schemes, with the Council committed to ensuring resources continue to be in place to support these areas.

The Service Director also provided assurance that on-going work takes place with services as part of workforce planning arrangements, to identify the business need for graduate and apprentices, with budget management processes ensuring the necessary funding is in place.

In respect of the Social Care Workforce Grant it was confirmed that the overall savings built into the draft budget strategy, alongside the use of transition funding, takes account of the reduced level of grant. The Service Director also indicated that as part of on-going engagement with Welsh Government, the impact of the reduction in grant has been fed back.

Mr C Jones (GMB) welcomed the update regarding the apprenticeship and graduate schemes and went on to highlight concerns in respect of the proposed uplift to car parking charges and the potential financial hardship this would place on some staff. Councillor Morgan noted the availability of season parking tickets, with the price proposed to be frozen for 2024/25, and indicated that if there are specific cases to be looked into further, for these to be fed back.

Mr Jones also took the opportunity to note the Day Centre proposals and spoke of concerns of the impact on the most vulnerable residents in the County Borough.

Ms L Davies (Unite) focussed on the proposed charge for Meals on Wheels and referenced whether there had been a decline in the service following the previous service change introduced. Ms Davies noted the vulnerability of service users and the financial and social impact the proposed increase may have on them. The Deputy Leader reiterated the importance of the service, noted that rising food costs was the reason for the proposed meal price increase and commented on the quality meals that were available as part of the service.

The Service Director noted the important service the Meals on Wheels Service provides and its links to social care services within the Council. The Service Director went on to note that the Council continues to subsidise the service, with the meal price to customers at the lower end of the spectrum compared to neighbouring local authorities. The Service

Director added that further information will be requested in respect of current service take-up.

Mr McCarthy (Unite) requested further information in respect of Council investment to develop a solar farm and the associated generation and sale of energy. The Service Director fed back that an agreement is in place with Royal Glamorgan Hospital, with the Council responsible for funding the project and owning the asset, with income to be generated from 2024/25. The Service Director added that specific information in respect of the arrangement is commercially sensitive and would enquire whether further detail could be provided.

Members of the Trade Unions highlighted the importance of good communication links between the Council and Trade Unions, and the need for on-going communication on budget savings and their implementation, if agreed by the Council. The Director of Human Resources fed back that arrangements are in place to ensure open dialogue continues to take place.

Mr McCarthy posed the question to the Committee in respect of the ethical treatment of agency labour and the Director of Human Resources commented upon the discussions that have taken place in this regard and the phased approach being progressed.

The Chair thanked all Members for their contributions to the meeting and following discussions it was **RESOLVED**:

1. To provide feedback on the draft 2024/25 Revenue Budget Strategy as part of phase 2 of the Council's 2024-25 Budget Consultation

**This meeting closed at 1.30 pm**

**M Webber  
Chairman.**



## RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

### CABINET

21<sup>st</sup> FEBRUARY 2024

#### THE COUNCIL'S CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2024/25 – 2026/27

#### REPORT OF THE DEPUTY CHIEF EXECUTIVE & GROUP DIRECTOR – FINANCE, DIGITAL & FRONTLINE SERVICES IN DISCUSSION WITH THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL, CLLR A MORGAN OBE

Author: Barrie Davies (01443 424026)

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

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide Cabinet with a proposed three year capital programme for 2024/25 to 2026/27 that if acceptable, will be presented to Council for approval.

#### **2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is recommended that the Cabinet:

- 2.1 Review, and if acceptable propose the attached three-year capital programme at Appendix A to Council on 6<sup>th</sup> March 2024 which includes:
- 2.1.1 A proposed allocation of resources as detailed in paragraph 5 of the attached report;
  - 2.1.2 Proposed investment priorities as detailed in paragraph 6.2 of the attached report;
  - 2.1.3 The Council's core capital programme;
  - 2.1.4 The Council's total capital programme including additional non core funding.
- 2.2 Authorise the Deputy Chief Executive & Group Director – Finance, Digital & Frontline Services to amend the level of Council Resources required to fund the Core Three Year Capital Programme as shown at Appendix 2 as a consequence of any change to the Council's capital resource levels announced in the Final Local Government Settlement.

#### **3.0 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 3.1 To agree that the report at Appendix A is acceptable and is proposed by Cabinet to Council on 6<sup>th</sup> March 2024.

#### **4.0 BACKGROUND**

4.1 The Council's Corporate Plan reinforces the need to continue to live within our means, deliver an efficient and effective Council, maximise opportunities and have a shared responsibility. The draft report at Appendix A expands on this and proposes the Council's three year capital programme commencing 1<sup>st</sup> April 2024.

#### **5.0 THE PROVISIONAL LOCAL GOVERNMENT SETTLEMENT FOR 2024/25**

5.1 The timing of the Local Government Settlement for 2024/25 has followed the UK Government Autumn Statement as announced on 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2023, with the provisional settlement being announced on the 20<sup>th</sup> December 2023.

5.2 The Final Local Government Settlement for 2024/25 is expected to be received late February / early March 2024.

5.3 There are no indications of any significant changes between the provisional and final settlement, but such a risk clearly remains.

5.4 In order to ensure that Cabinet are able to recommend a balanced capital programme to Council on the 6<sup>th</sup> March 2024, and given the timing of the Final Settlement, it will be necessary to authorise the Deputy Chief Executive & Group Director – Finance, Digital & Frontline Services to amend the programme to deal with any change between Provisional and Final Settlement. It is proposed that any change is dealt with by means of amending the contribution from Council Resources across the 3 year programme, providing the opportunity to rebalance as necessary into future years.

#### **6.0 EQUALITY & DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS / SOCIO-ECONOMIC DUTY**

6.1 An Equality Impact Assessment is not needed because the contents of this report relate solely to the proposed report to Council at Appendix A.

#### **7.0 WELSH LANGUAGE IMPLICATIONS**

7.1 There are no Welsh language implications as a result of the recommendations in this report.

#### **8.0 CONSULTATION**

8.1 Details regarding consultation relating to the Council's budget strategy are subject to a separate report.

#### **9.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)**

9.1 All financial implications are included in the proposed report to Council at Appendix A.



**10.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED**

10.1 There are no legal implications as a result of the recommendations set out in the report.

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

11.1 The Council’s capital programme is focussed on investing capital resources in line with all the Corporate Plan priorities. The capital investment also contributes to all of the seven national well being goals.

**12.0 CONCLUSION**

12.1 The draft report at Appendix A sets out the proposed capital programme from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2024 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2027.

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**RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL****MUNICIPAL YEAR 2023-2024****COUNCIL****6<sup>th</sup> MARCH 2024****THE COUNCIL'S THREE YEAR CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2024/25 – 2026/27****REPORT OF THE CABINET****AUTHOR: BARRIE DAVIES, DEPUTY CHIEF EXECUTIVE & GROUP DIRECTOR – FINANCE, DIGITAL & FRONTLINE SERVICES (01443) 424026****1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT**

1.1 This report sets out the Council's proposed Capital Programme for 2024/25 to 2026/27, following receipt of the provisional local government settlement for 2024/25.

**2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is recommended that Members:

- 2.1 Note the detail of the provisional 2024/25 local government settlement for capital expenditure, reproduced at Appendix 1;
- 2.2 Agree to the proposed reallocation of existing resources, and allocation of new resources as detailed in paragraph 5;
- 2.3 Agree to allocate the funding identified in the report to the investment priorities as detailed in paragraph 6.2;
- 2.4 Agree the proposed 'core' three year programme detailed at Appendix 2;
- 2.5 Agree the proposed total three-year Capital Programme, detailed at Appendices 3 (a) to (e), which includes the following non core capital funding:
- Prudential borrowing to support Sustainable Communities for Learning Schemes (formerly 21st Century Schools);
  - Capital grants for specific schemes;
  - Third party contributions; and
  - The investment priorities detailed in paragraph 6.2.

### **3.0 BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 Members will be aware that each year the Council is allocated a sum of unhypothecated “Supported” borrowing and General Capital Grant from the Welsh Government (WG). Details of the provisional allocation for 2024/25 are shown at Appendix 1. The funding for 2024/25 has decreased by £0.058M and totals £13.828M (£180M all Wales).
- 3.2 WG’s draft budget maintains General Capital Funding at £180M (all Wales) for 2024/25, with a further £20M (all Wales) in respect of decarbonisation. It is proposed that any additional resources are considered as part of future Investment Priority reviews outside of our Core Programme.
- 3.3 Members have continued to receive regular updates on the projections of the Council’s revenue budget position to 2026/27. The Revenue Budget Strategy for 2024/25 includes a proposal to capitalise expenditure which is currently funded from our revenue budgets which in line with accounting rules, is actually capital in nature.
- 3.4 These expenditure items relate to IT software licence costs totalling £0.500M which is now proposed to be included in our core programme allocations. The allocations are shown at Appendix 2 which proposes a core programme totalling £14.180M.
- 3.5 To set the core programme at this level, and in light of latest capital receipt forecasts and use of capital reserves, would leave a remaining balance of £2.148M (for 2024/25) of WG General Capital Funding which can be used to contribute toward funding Investment Priorities over and above the core programme as set out at paragraph 6.2.
- 3.6 The wider overall capital programme however includes approved prudential borrowing, specific grants and agreed additional investment in our key priorities.

### **4.0 THE NEW THREE YEAR PROGRAMME (2024/25 TO 2026/27)**

- 4.1 The proposed new 3 year capital programme for 2024/25 to 2026/27 represents a total investment of **£165.630M**. This comprises:
- A Core programme of £42.540M over the next 3 years;
  - Prudential borrowing of £13.138M to support the Sustainable Communities for Learning Programme;
  - Specific grants of £42.968M;
  - Third party contributions of £0.015M;
  - Earmarked reserves and revenue contributions previously allocated to schemes and investment priorities of £33.588M;
  - Capital resources, in addition to the 3 year core allocation, of £14.114M; and
  - If agreed, allocated earmarked reserves of £15.035M, reallocated earmarked reserves of £2.084M and reallocated core funding of £2.148M, to fund the proposed investment priorities detailed in paragraph 6.2.
- 4.2 Having due regard to the level of available capital resources, both from WG and

from our own capital receipts, the new core programme for 2024/25 to 2026/27 is set at £14.180M per year. This represents a fully funded £42.540M core programme across the 3 years.

- 4.3 There remains a risk that the projected capital receipts are less than anticipated and projections will continue to be closely monitored.
- 4.4 Whilst allocating core resources for three years, there remains the requirement for us to continue to review and challenge any commitments made into years two and three, to robustly monitor capital receipt projections and to position ourselves to respond as appropriate and necessary as we move forward.
- 4.5 Given the timing of external funding approval processes, it will be necessary to maintain flexibility of funding across individual schemes in order to ensure the most efficient delivery of the overall programme.
- 4.6 Details of the overall capital programme for the 3 year period are set out in Section 7 of this report.

## **5.0 FURTHER AVAILABLE FUNDING**

- 5.1 The Council has maintained an Investment/Infrastructure reserve for a number of years to fund the cost of maintaining and enhancing infrastructure across the County Borough. The balance of this reserve at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023 was £24.950M, against which £7.730M has already been released, leaving £17.220M available to fund further investment priorities.
- 5.2 An Invest to Save reserve has also been maintained to fund opportunities as and when they arise, including investment in carbon reduction and renewable energy projects which results in a reduction in energy costs and/or additional income for the Council. The balance of this reserve at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023 was £6.887M, of which £4.021M has been committed to projects leaving £2.866M available to fund further Invest to Save opportunities.
- 5.3 Our capital expenditure and commitments are closely monitored across the 3 year period of the programme and it is not unusual for spend to slip into future years and present opportunities for the reallocation of resources. In this regard an amount of £2.084M has been identified which can be reprioritised without adversely impacting on wider programme delivery and whilst maintaining the new core programme.
- 5.4 The total additional available funding, as outlined above (and paragraph 3.5) is £24.318M

## **6.0 INVESTMENT PRIORITIES**

- 6.1 The Cabinet believe that the most appropriate use of these one off resources is to continue to invest in our infrastructure and to support the aspirations and priorities of the Corporate Plan.
- 6.2 In being able to support the above objectives, Cabinet have identified the following

specific areas which it is proposed that Council agree to be invested in:

<b>Investment Priority</b>	<b>£M</b>
Highways Maintenance	5.050
Unadopted Roads	0.200
Highways Structures	1.000
Rhigos Mountain Road Rock Netting	1.404
Flood Alleviation	1.000
Streetcare Bins (revenue allocation)	0.025
Parks Structures	0.250
Parks & Green Spaces	1.395
Country Parks Investment	0.305
Play Areas	0.350
Multi Use Games Areas (MUGAs)	0.225
Coed Ely Solar Farm	7.388
Hawthorn Hockey Pitch	0.350
Leisure Fitness Equipment	0.350
<b>Total Council Investment</b>	<b>19.292</b>

6.3 The above investment priorities can be funded from the resources identified at paragraph 5.4, with the remaining resource amounting to £5.026M being retained in our Investment/Infrastructure reserve to fund future priorities.

6.4 Further details on these investments are included in section 7.

## **7.0 THE THREE YEAR CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2024/25 – 2026/27**

7.1 The details of the 3 year proposed programme for each Service Group are provided below.

### **CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S GROUP**

7.2 The latest projections show expected full year capital spend of £28.498M for the Chief Executive's Group in 2023/24.

### **CORPORATE ESTATES**

7.3 The total resources for 2024/25, as outlined in the proposed three-year Capital Programme is £8.829M.

7.4 As identified in 6.2 additional investment has been provided in Corporate Estates in the following areas:

- Coed Ely Solar Farm – £7.388M (including £2.866M from the Invest to Save reserve referenced in paragraph 5.2). The Council is progressing the development of a 6-megawatt solar farm on the former Coed Ely colliery site, which is owned by the Council. The renewable (green) energy produced will be

for the benefit of the public sector and enable an offset of over 1,100 tonnes of carbon per year, and around 47,000 tonnes over the expected 40 year lifecycle.

- 7.5 As part of the Council's on-going programme to ensure high standards of health and safety and operational efficiency within its premises, appropriate resources continue to be allocated to our operational accommodation, the management and remediation of Asbestos and Legionella and resources for energy efficiency/carbon reduction measures across our property estate. We await details of the £20M allocated by WG for decarbonisation.

## **PROSPERITY AND DEVELOPMENT**

### **Regeneration**

- 7.6 A budget of £15.875M for 2024/25 has been allocated to support the next phase of Regeneration.
- 7.7 The Council's Capital Programme continues to provide a long-term funding commitment to the economic regeneration of the County Borough in line with its Corporate Plan.
- 7.8 In addition to the above, sustained investment has been maintained across a range of funding streams, supported by external funding and resources prioritised toward the Corporate Plan Investment Priorities. This has enabled a wide range of regeneration activity to be delivered to benefit the local economy.
- 7.9 The Council will continue to work with partners to develop and progress exciting and innovative schemes such as:
- The redevelopment of key sites in the Southern Gateway Quarter in Pontypridd town centre including the former Bingo Hall site and former M&S, Burton and Dorothy Perkins site;
  - Townscape Enhancements across our key town centres – a targeted approach to acquiring, redeveloping and upgrading town centre buildings for increased business and commercial use and continuing to improve the quality of the townscape providing business investment and employment growth. This will be supported by the development and delivery of strategies and placemaking plans for our key town centres;
  - The former Rates Building redevelopment and plans to redevelop the Rock Grounds Buildings are being brought forward as part of the Aberdare Town Centre Strategy; and
  - Sources of investment post EU funds are being accessed to bring forward projects such as the UK Government Levelling Up Fund where successful bids have been made for the Muni Arts Centre Redevelopment, Porth Transport Hub and A4119 Dualling projects and also the UK Government Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF) where delivering the RCT SPF Local Investment Plan is a key priority.
- 7.10 The programme of regeneration projects will add value to the significant regeneration investment that has already taken place and will act as a catalyst for the development and delivery of further regeneration activity.

## **Cardiff Capital Region City Deal**

- 7.11 A budget of £1M per year is allocated toward the Council's commitment to the Cardiff Capital Region City Deal Wider Investment Fund.

### **Planning and Countryside**

- 7.12 A budget for 2024/25 of £0.943M has been allocated to the Planning and Countryside programme, this will enable the Council to continue to develop and progress schemes which improve the countryside. Supported by external funding, the Council will continue working on schemes which improve access to and on the Public Rights of Way network, open access land and green and blue spaces
- 7.13 As identified in 6.2 additional investment has been provided in Planning and Countryside in the following area:

- Country Parks Investment - £0.305M

### **Private Sector Housing**

- 7.14 A budget for 2024/25 of £11.574M has been allocated and the programme comprises the following schemes to contribute to the delivery of the Council's Corporate Plan.
- Disabled Facilities Grants;
  - Maintenance Repair Assistance Grants;
  - Renovation Grants in Exceptional Circumstances;
  - Delivery of Welsh Government's National Empty Homes Grant Scheme for all participating Local Authorities in Wales from April 2024 to March 2026;
  - Shared Prosperity Fund Heating Grant and Solar Panel Grant which provides financial support for residents to make their homes more energy efficient;
  - Affordable Housing through the Social Housing Grant; and
  - Tackling Poverty Fund.

## **FINANCE, DIGITAL AND FRONTLINE SERVICES**

- 7.15 The latest projections show expected full year capital spend of £79.246M for Finance, Digital and Frontline Services in 2023/24.
- 7.16 The total resources for 2024/25, as outlined in the proposed three-year Capital Programme is £41.760M.
- 7.17 As identified in 6.2 additional investment has been provided in Finance, Digital and Frontline Services in the following areas:
- Highways Maintenance – £5.050M
  - Unadopted Roads – £0.200M
  - Highways Structures – £1.000M
  - Rhigos Mountain Road Rock Netting – £1.404M
  - Flood Alleviation – £1.000M
  - Parks Structures Improvements – £0.250M

- Parks & Green Spaces – £1.395M

This additional investment is included in the figures presented in Appendix 3b.

## **FRONTLINE SERVICES**

### **Highways Technical Services**

7.18 A budget for 2024/25 of £14.265M has been allocated to the next phase of the Council's Highways Improvement programme and in doing so supports the delivery of the Council's Corporate Plan. Schemes comprise:

- Road surface treatments and resurfacing – £6.757M
- Car park improvements – £0.035M
- Major repairs to structures such as bridges and walls – £6.580M
- Parks Structures Improvements – £0.320M
- Street lighting replacement and upgrades – £0.473M
- Traffic Management – £0.100M

### **Strategic Projects**

7.19 A budget for 2024/25 of £16.629M has been allocated to Strategic Projects for major economic infrastructure investment and a programme of multi-modal transport enhancements ranging from sustainable travel initiatives to encourage walking and cycling, park and ride facilities, "making better use" enhancements, road safety and drainage improvements. Funding has been allocated as follows:

- Transport Grant Schemes – £0.580M
- Major Economic Transport Infrastructure investments and associated transportation enhancements – £14.779M
- Drainage Improvements and Land Reclamation Schemes – £1.270M

7.20 There remains uncertainty with regard to the level of WG grant funding for 2024/25. It is anticipated that further funding will be made available to undertake modifications to the Welsh Government Default 20mph speed limit initiative. Road Safety Revenue and Road Safety Capital grants will also be available to be bid for this year. A number of individual grants, such as Resilient Roads fund, have now been incorporated into the Local Transport Fund grant. Bids for various funds returned during January and February are expected to be confirmed during March. Bids have also been submitted for "Small Scale" flood alleviation schemes with the upper limit of funding for individual schemes set at £0.200M, and to the major projects Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management (FCERM) programme to gain Approval in Principle for funding.

7.21 A supplementary report on the detail of proposed schemes for Highways, Transportation & Strategic Projects will be presented to Cabinet shortly.

### **Storm Dennis Flood Recovery**

7.22 Following the unprecedented weather events of Storm Dennis in February 2020, the Council will have already spent £47M on repairing, replacing and improving infrastructure damaged by this exceptional storm event by the end of March 2024.



- 7.23 Funding for the recovery work is provided by WG on an annual basis and the Council continues to work closely with WG to ensure funding is increased and secured during the financial year to maintain the momentum of the recovery programme. Formal confirmation of the funding for 2024/25 is awaited from WG, however the Council has assurance from WG to continue with recovery works. In anticipation of the funding for 2024/25 being confirmed a total budget for 2024/25 of £4.485M is now included.
- 7.24 There are a significant number of schemes ongoing to repair and replace bridges, river walls and retaining walls, as well as a work programme to deal with coal spoil tip safety, including the remediation process following Tylorstown landslip.

### **Parks**

- 7.25 Investment in Parks infrastructure in 2024/25 totals £1.643M to fund a rolling programme of improvements to drainage, pavilions, buildings and other infrastructure such as seating, fencing, paths and walls.

### **Waste Strategy**

- 7.26 The budget for 2024/25 is £1.184M. This relates to consideration of the feasibility of implementing a transfer station to reduce operational costs associated with hauling waste and recycling, and to reduce the carbon footprint associated with the significant operation.

### **Fleet**

- 7.27 The 3 year rolling programme for replacement vehicles continues. The 3 year allocation is £4.958M. This service area is subject to ongoing assessment and continuous review of requirements.

## **EDUCATION AND INCLUSION SERVICES**

- 7.28 The latest projections show expected full year capital spend of £72.862M for Education & Inclusion in 2023/24.
- 7.29 The total resources available to Education & Inclusion Services for 2024/25, as outlined in the proposed three-year Capital Programme, is £38.790M and will support the delivery of the Council's Corporate Plan. This investment will also support the delivery of Strategic Priority 5: Delivering 21st Century learning environments and innovative services for our learners and communities, of the Education and Inclusion Services Strategic Plan.
- 7.30 As identified in 6.2 additional investment has been provided in Education and Inclusion Services in the following areas:
- Hawthorn Hockey Pitch - £0.350M

## Schools

- 7.31 The Council will continue to deliver and support its long-term strategic investment school modernisation programme, creating environments that meet the needs of learners and our communities, providing the best learning provision and supporting positive outcomes for young people and the wider community. The programme of capital investment is delivered utilising Council funding, WG Sustainable Communities for Learning funding (previously the 21st Century Schools and Colleges Programme) and Section 106 funding.
- 7.32 The following key school projects are either in progress or planned, and are included in the overall strategic programme and include a combination of refurbishments, remodelling, demolitions and new buildings:
- YGG Llyn Y Forwyn – construction is ongoing to build a brand new school on a new site in the Rhondda Fach, increasing Welsh medium capacity and providing community facilities;
  - Creation of Ysgol Afon Wen – works are continuing to construct a new teaching block providing exciting new learning environments for all pupils of the new school. Demolition of the existing school buildings plus extensive external improvement works are also planned;
  - Creation of Ysgol Bro Taf – significant remodelling and refurbishment works will continue throughout the school, providing new learning environments for all pupils, delivering new sports facilities that will be available for the wider community, plus the creation of a new car park and bus-bay area;
  - Creation of Ysgol Awel Taf – works on the brand new Welsh medium school are ongoing, remaining works include the creation of the staff and visitor car park and bus-bays;
  - Bryncelynnog Comprehensive School – works to improve facilities at the school continue. The remaining works include the creation of a new car park; and
  - Childcare Capital Grant – improvements to existing childcare provision at Glenboi Primary School and Penderyn will be delivered, improving the environments and increasing the childcare offer.
- 7.33 In addition to the above schemes being delivered through capital funding, the Council has been successful in securing funding via WG's Mutual Investment Model (MIM) programme, which is the revenue funding element of the Sustainable Communities for Learning Programme. The Council has entered into a 25-year contract for the design, build, funding and building maintenance of three schools. Continuation of work during 2024/25 will deliver:
- Pontyclun Primary School (by early 2025) – All existing buildings (including temporary classrooms) will be demolished to construct a new two-storey school building, sports and recreation facilities. Hard play areas will be provided externally, along with two (MUGAs) and other informal grass play areas;
  - Llanilltud Faerdref Primary School (by spring 2024) – A new single-storey building will be constructed on the existing grassed playing field area on the eastern part of the site. Externally, there will be landscaped areas and hard and soft play areas set around the school. Two MUGAs will be built, along with a grass sports pitch (5-a-side) and a 40-metre grass sprint track; and
  - Penygawsi Primary School (by summer 2024) – All existing buildings will be demolished to construct a new two-storey building at the north-east corner of

the site. Hard play areas will be provided externally, along with a grass sports pitch (7-a-side), two MUGAs and informal play areas at the southern end of the site.

### **Planned Capital Works**

- 7.34 The planned capital works programme allocation for 2024/25 is £6.315M. The allocation includes an on-going rolling programme for kitchen refurbishments/remodelling, window & door replacements, essential works, electrical rewiring, fire alarm upgrades, toilet refurbishments, Equalities Act/compliance works, access condition surveys, boiler replacements, roof renewals, asbestos remediation works, 21st Century classroom upgrades, external improvements, capitalisation of IT hardware/software & licences and improvements to schools. Also included is funding to support capital expenditure in relation to the Universal Primary Free School Meals initiative.
- 7.35 A supplementary report detailing proposals of works for consideration within the above-mentioned programme will be presented to Cabinet shortly.

### **COMMUNITY AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES**

- 7.36 The latest projections show expected full year capital spend of £13.110M for Community and Children's Services in 2023/24.
- 7.37 The total resources available to Community and Children's Services for 2024/25, as outlined in the proposed three-year Capital Programme is £12.464M.
- 7.38 As identified in 6.2 additional investment has been provided in Community and Children's Services in the following areas:
- Multi Use Games Areas (MUGAs) – £0.225M
  - Play Areas – £0.350M
  - New Leisure Fitness Equipment - £0.350M

This additional investment is included in the figures presented in Appendix 3d.

### **Adult & Children's Services**

- 7.39 The programme for Adult and Children's Services includes a budget of £7.464M in 2024/25. This will continue to fund the essential refurbishment and improvement works to the Council's Adult & Children's Services establishments, including the extra-care programme, in line with care standards and health & safety legislation. Also included are additional costs associated with Telecare Services.
- 7.40 The Council is working towards the successful delivery of the Council's extra care strategy including residential dementia care, a fourth new accommodation for adults with learning disabilities, and investment in the Council's own care homes. The strategy will lead to the development of a more sustainable model of residential services providing the best possible care and support.
- 7.41 The capital funding requirements to deliver the proposals for investment in new

facilities will be considered by Cabinet as individual schemes are developed. This will include reviewing all opportunities to secure any available external (Welsh Government) sources of finance to support the timely delivery of the strategy.

- 7.42 These investments will support the delivery of the Council's Corporate Plan Priorities.

### **Public Health & Protection**

- 7.43 The Public Health and Protection programme has a budget of £5.000M in 2024/25. This budget is allocated across the ongoing rolling programmes for Cemeteries and Community Safety measures. Also included in this budget are allocations for investment and improvement works at Leisure Centres and Play Areas. The redevelopment of the Muni Arts Centre is also included in this programme, and overall, the areas of investment support the delivery of the Council's Corporate Plan Priorities.

## **1.0 EQUALITY & DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC DUTY**

- 1.1 Due regard has been given to the Council's public sector equality duties under the Equality Act 2010, namely the Public Sector Equality Duty and Socio-Economic Duty.
- 1.2 An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed and concluded that the recommendations set out in the report are in line with the above legislation.

## **2.0 WELSH LANGUAGE IMPLICATIONS**

- 2.1 There are no Welsh language implications as a result of the recommendations in this report.

## **3.0 CONSULTATION**

- 3.1 Consultation and engagement has been undertaken as part of formulating the revised programme and this was also built into the wider consultation exercise undertaken in respect of the recommended 2024/25 Revenue Budget Strategy, where consultees were asked what services are important to them in Rhondda Cynon Taf.

## **4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)**

- 4.1 The financial implications of the recommendations are set out in the main body of the report.

## **5.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED**

- 5.1 The Council's proposed Capital Programme for 2024/25 to 2026/27 complies fully

with all legal requirements.

## **6.0 LINKS TO CORPORATE AND NATIONAL PRIORITIES AND THE WELL-BEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS ACT**

6.1 The Council's proposed Capital Programme for 2024/25 to 2026/27 has been formulated to support the delivery of the Council's strategic priorities, as set out within the Corporate Plan, with these documents being aligned to the goals and principles included within the Well-Being of Future Generations Act.

## **7.0 CONCLUSIONS**

7.1 The three year Capital Programme is a key component of the overall Medium Term Financial Planning and Resources Strategy for this Council. Targeted capital investment can make a significant impact on service delivery and used effectively, is able to underpin the Council's Corporate Plan Priorities, where relevant.

7.2 This report sets out the capital investment priorities for the Council through to March 2027. It represents an ambitious and significant level of investment (£165.630M) over the next 3 years.

7.3 The programme includes some element of slippage identified throughout 2023/24, which is subject to change when final spend for the capital programme is known and the 2023/24 accounts are finalised. Any changes to slippage will be reported as part of the Council's quarterly performance reports.

7.4 This report has also identified the opportunity to invest £19.292M of additional resources in our local area and infrastructure in order to improve the services and facilities which are available to our residents.

7.5 As the year progresses, changes will be made to the programme, for example, where new schemes can be supported by specific grants. Approval from Members will be sought as these opportunities arise throughout 2024/25.

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**Table 2a: Breakdown of General Capital Funding (GCF), by Unitary Authority, 2024-25 (£000)**

Provisional Settlement

<b>Unitary Authority</b>	<b>General Capital Funding 2024-25</b>	<b>of which: General Capital Grant</b>	<b>of which: Unhypothecated Supported Borrowing</b>
Isle of Anglesey	4,386	2,222	2,164
Gwynedd	8,223	4,166	4,057
Conwy	6,899	3,496	3,403
Denbighshire	6,185	3,134	3,051
Flintshire	8,142	4,125	4,017
Wrexham	7,018	3,556	3,462
Powys	9,297	4,710	4,587
Ceredigion	5,854	2,966	2,888
Pembrokeshire	7,587	3,844	3,743
Carmarthenshire	11,989	6,074	5,915
Swansea	12,943	6,558	6,385
Neath Port Talbot	8,950	4,535	4,415
Bridgend	7,980	4,043	3,937
The Vale of Glamorgan	6,986	3,540	3,446
<b>Rhondda Cynon Taf</b>	<b>13,828</b>	<b>7,006</b>	<b>6,822</b>
Merthyr Tydfil	3,157	1,600	1,557
Caerphilly	9,731	4,930	4,801
Blaenau Gwent	3,855	1,953	1,902
Torfaen	5,405	2,739	2,666
Monmouthshire	4,938	2,502	2,436
Newport	8,459	4,286	4,173
Cardiff	18,188	9,215	8,973
<b>Total unitary authorities</b>	<b>180,000</b>	<b>91,200</b>	<b>88,800</b>

## PROPOSED "CORE" THREE YEAR CAPITAL PROGRAMME

**2024 / 2027**

<b>SERVICE GROUPS</b>	<b>2024-25</b>	<b>2025-26</b>	<b>2026-27</b>
	<b>£M</b>	<b>£M</b>	<b>£M</b>
Chief Executive's Group	5.740	5.740	5.740
Finance, Digital & Frontline Services	4.926	4.926	4.926
Education & Inclusion Services	2.768	2.768	2.768
Community & Children's Services	0.746	0.746	0.746
<b>Total Capital Expenditure</b>	<b>14.180</b>	<b>14.180</b>	<b>14.180</b>

### Estimated Resources Required to Fund Capital Programme

#### Welsh Government General Capital Funding

Supported borrowing	6.822	6.822	6.822
General Capital Grant	7.006	7.006	7.006
<b>Total WG Funding</b>	<b>13.828</b>	<b>13.828</b>	<b>13.828</b>

WG capital funding allocated to fund Investment Priorities	-	2.148	-	1.898	-	1.898
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<b>Total Available to fund the Core Programme</b>	<b>11.680</b>	<b>11.930</b>	<b>11.930</b>
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#### Council Resources

Council Resources	2.500	2.250	2.250
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<b>Total Resources Required to Fund the "Core" Capital Programme</b>	<b>14.180</b>	<b>14.180</b>	<b>14.180</b>
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Scheme	3 Year Capital Programme 2024 - 2027			
	2024/2025 Budget	2025/2026 Budget	2026/2027 Budget	Total 3 Year Budget
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000

**Corporate Estates**

Major repair/refurbishment and/or rationalisation of Service Group Accommodation	611	100	100	811
Strategic Maintenance	40	40	40	120
Asset Management Planning	35	35	35	105
Asbestos Management	115	115	115	345
Asbestos Remediation Works	35	35	35	105
Legionella Remediation Works	180	180	180	540
Legionella Management	115	115	115	345
Coed Ely Solar Farm	6,638	750	0	7,388
Carbon Reduction Programme	760	280	280	1,320
Electric Vehicles Charging	300	0	0	300
<b>Total Corporate Estates</b>	<b>8,829</b>	<b>1,650</b>	<b>900</b>	<b>11,379</b>

**Prosperity & Development**

**Regeneration**

Enterprise Investment Fund	480	130	130	740
Town Centre Maintenance Grants (SPF)	50	0	0	50
Town Centre Property Improvements (SPF)	715	0	0	715
96-102 Taff St, Pontypridd	100	0	0	100
Pontypridd Southern Gateway	12,198	0	0	12,198
Transforming Towns Place Making Grant	690	0	0	690
Former Rates Building, Aberdare	646	0	0	646
Major Projects Investment Fund	589	0	0	589
Regeneration Investment	350	270	270	890
Ynysangharad Park Brilliant Basics Fund	37	0	0	37
Rock Grounds Development	20	0	0	20
<b>Total Regeneration</b>	<b>15,875</b>	<b>400</b>	<b>400</b>	<b>16,675</b>

**Cardiff Capital Region City Deal**

Cardiff Capital Region City Deal	1,000	1,000	1,000	3,000
<b>Total Cardiff Capital Region City Deal</b>	<b>1,000</b>	<b>1,000</b>	<b>1,000</b>	<b>3,000</b>

**Planning & Countryside**

Local Places for Nature	539	0	0	539
Countryside	404	0	0	404
<b>Total Planning &amp; Countryside</b>	<b>943</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>943</b>

Scheme	3 Year Capital Programme 2024 - 2027			
	2024/2025 Budget	2025/2026 Budget	2026/2027 Budget	Total 3 Year Budget
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000

**Private Sector Housing**

Disabled Facilities Grants/Adaptations (DFG)	2,315	2,875	2,875	8,065
Maintenance Repair Assistance (MRA)	235	235	235	705
Renovation Grants Exceptional Circumstances & Home Improvement Zones	711	235	235	1,181
Empty Properties Grants Investment	2,213	0	0	2,213
National Empty Homes Grant Scheme	2,383	1,811	0	4,194
Affordable Housing	2,000	1,000	515	3,515
Tackling Poverty Fund	250	0	0	250
Community Regeneration	1,467	100	95	1,662
<b>Total Private Sector Housing</b>	<b>11,574</b>	<b>6,256</b>	<b>3,955</b>	<b>21,785</b>

<b>Total Prosperity &amp; Development</b>	<b>29,392</b>	<b>7,656</b>	<b>5,355</b>	<b>42,403</b>
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<b>Group Total</b>	<b>38,221</b>	<b>9,306</b>	<b>6,255</b>	<b>53,782</b>
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Chief Executive

Paul Mee

Service Director - Finance Services

Martyn Hughes

Scheme	3 Year Capital Programme 2024 - 2027			
	2024/2025 Budget	2025/2026 Budget	2026/2027 Budget	Total 3 Year Budget
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000

**Finance & Digital Services**

CIVICA Financials	240	240	240	720
Capitalisation of Computer HW/SW & Licences	1,342	1,342	1,342	4,026
<b>Total Finance &amp; Digital Services</b>	<b>1,582</b>	<b>1,582</b>	<b>1,582</b>	<b>4,746</b>

**Frontline Services**

**Highways Technical Services**

Highways Improvements	6,757	930	930	8,617
Car Parks	35	40	40	115
Structures	6,580	195	195	6,970
Parks Structures	320	0	0	320
Street Lighting	473	330	130	933
Traffic Management	100	100	100	300
<b>Total Highways Technical Services</b>	<b>14,265</b>	<b>1,595</b>	<b>1,395</b>	<b>17,255</b>

**Strategic Projects**

Transportation and Travel Schemes	580	0	0	580
Transportation Infrastructure	14,779	25	25	14,829
Drainage Improvements	1,255	95	95	1,445
Land Reclamation	15	0	0	15
<b>Total Strategic Projects</b>	<b>16,629</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>16,869</b>

**Storm Dennis Flood Recovery**

Storm Dennis Flood Recovery	4,485	0	0	4,485
<b>Total Storm Dennis Flood Recovery</b>	<b>4,485</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>4,485</b>

**Parks**

Parks	1,643	65	65	1,773
<b>Total Parks</b>	<b>1,643</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>1,773</b>

**Waste Strategy**

Waste Strategy	1,184	0	0	1,184
<b>Total Waste Strategy</b>	<b>1,184</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1,184</b>

**Fleet**

Vehicles	1,758	1,600	1,600	4,958
<b>Total Fleet</b>	<b>1,758</b>	<b>1,600</b>	<b>1,600</b>	<b>4,958</b>

Scheme	3 Year Capital Programme 2024 - 2027			
	2024/2025 Budget	2025/2026 Budget	2026/2027 Budget	Total 3 Year Budget
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000

### Buildings

Buildings	95	45	45	185
Capitalised Equipment	119	119	119	357
<b>Total Buildings</b>	<b>214</b>	<b>164</b>	<b>164</b>	<b>542</b>

<b>Total Frontline Services</b>	<b>40,178</b>	<b>3,544</b>	<b>3,344</b>	<b>47,066</b>
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<b>Group Total</b>	<b>41,760</b>	<b>5,126</b>	<b>4,926</b>	<b>51,812</b>
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Deputy Chief Executive and Group Director

Barrie Davies

Service Director - Finance Services

Martyn Hughes

Scheme	3 Year Capital Programme 2024 - 2027			
	2024/2025 Budget	2025/2026 Budget	2026/2027 Budget	Total 3 Year Budget
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000

## Schools

School Modernisation Rhondda and Tonyrefail	974	0	0	974
School Modernisation	5,177	259	100	5,536
Bryncelynnog Comprehensive	296	0	0	296
Y Pant Extension	351	0	0	351
Aberdare Church in Wales Primary School	350	0	0	350
SRIC - School Modernisation Programme	1,089	0	0	1,089
Childcare Facility Improvements	1,588	0	0	1,588
<b>21st Century Schools Band B</b>				
YGG Awel Taf (New Welsh Medium Primary School Rhydfelin)	680	431	0	1,111
Ysgol Bro Taf (3-16 Pontypridd School Modernisation)	5,615	350	0	5,965
Ysgol Afon Wen (3-16 Hawthorn School Modernisation)	6,062	375	0	6,437
Bryncelynnog Comprehensive School Modernisation	1,592	0	0	1,592
YGG Llyn Y Forwyn	6,350	429	0	6,779
Mutual Investment Model Projects	2,351	0	0	2,351
<b>Total</b>	<b>32,475</b>	<b>1,844</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>34,419</b>

## Supplementary Capital Programme

Planned Kitchen Refurbishments	390	130	130	650
Window & Door Replacements	100	100	100	300
Essential Works	651	270	270	1,191
Capitalisation of Computer HW / SW & Licences	258	258	258	774
Roof Renewal	1,094	465	465	2,024
Boiler Replacement	290	170	170	630
Equalities Act/Compliance Works	1,939	155	155	2,249
Education & Inclusion Services Condition Surveys	200	35	35	270
Electrical Rewiring	115	130	130	375
Asbestos Remediation Work	500	595	595	1,690
Fire Alarm Upgrades	45	65	65	175
Toilet Refurbishments	308	235	235	778
Universal Primary Free School Meals Capital	360	0	0	360
Improvements to Schools	65	65	65	195
<b>Total</b>	<b>6,315</b>	<b>2,673</b>	<b>2,673</b>	<b>11,661</b>

<b>Group Total</b>	<b>38,790</b>	<b>4,517</b>	<b>2,773</b>	<b>46,080</b>
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Director of Education and Inclusion Services

Gaynor Davies

Service Director - Finance Services

Stephanie Davies

Scheme	3 Year Capital Programme 2024 - 2027			
	2024/2025 Budget	2025/2026 Budget	2026/2027 Budget	Total 3 Year Budget
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000

## Adult & Children's Services

Modernisation Programme (Adults)	6,968	95	95	7,158
Modernisation Programme (Childrens)	160	25	25	210
Asbestos Remediation	25	25	25	75
Telecare Equipment (Inc of Carelink Equipment)	140	140	140	420
Capitalisation of Computer HW / SW/Licences & Equipment	171	171	171	513
<b>Total Adult &amp; Children's Services</b>	<b>7,464</b>	<b>456</b>	<b>456</b>	<b>8,376</b>

## Public Health, Protection & Community Services

Leisure Centre Refurbishment Programme	415	55	55	525
Play Areas	620	45	45	710
Cemeteries Planned Programme	110	90	90	290
Community Safety Initiatives	2,149	45	45	2,239
Community Hubs	348	0	0	348
Culture	130	20	20	170
Muni Arts Project	1,193	0	0	1,193
Buildings	35	35	35	105
<b>Total Public Health, Protection &amp; Community Services</b>	<b>5,000</b>	<b>290</b>	<b>290</b>	<b>5,580</b>

<b>Group Total</b>	<b>12,464</b>	<b>746</b>	<b>746</b>	<b>13,956</b>
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Director of Social Services

Neil Elliott

Director of Public Health, Protection & Community Services

Louise Davies

Service Director - Finance Services

Neil Griffiths

## Appendix 3e

### Capital Programme from 1st April 2024 to 31st March 2027

Group	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	Total
	£M	£M	£M	£M
Chief Executive	38.221	9.306	6.255	53.782
Finance, Digital & Frontline Services	41.760	5.126	4.926	51.812
Education and Inclusion Services	38.790	4.517	2.773	46.080
Community and Children's Services	12.464	0.746	0.746	13.956
<b>Total</b>	<b>131.235</b>	<b>19.695</b>	<b>14.700</b>	<b>165.630</b>

#### Estimated Resources Required to Fund Capital Programme

Supported Borrowing	6.822	6.822	6.822	20.466
Unsupported Borrowing	12.157	0.981	0.000	13.138
<b>Total</b>	<b>18.979</b>	<b>7.803</b>	<b>6.822</b>	<b>33.604</b>

#### Capital Grants

General Capital Grant	7.006	7.006	7.006	21.018
WG National Empty Homes Grant Scheme	2.383	1.811		4.194
WG Local Transport Fund	0.580			0.580
WG Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management Grant	0.070			0.070
WG Flood Recovery Grant	3.619			3.619
WG Coal Tips Safety Grant	0.866			0.866
WG Sustainable Communities for Learning	10.721	0.604		11.325
WG Universal Primary FSM Grant	0.360			0.360
WG Access Improvement Grants	0.078			0.078
WG Voluntary Aided Schools Urgent Capital Repairs	0.350			0.350
WG ENABLE	0.476			0.476
UK Government Levelling Up Fund	0.731			0.731
UK Government Shared Prosperity Fund	14.752			14.752
WG Transforming Towns	1.336			1.336
WG PRS Lease Scheme	2.104			2.104
WCVA Local Places for Nature	0.539			0.539
WG Childcare	1.588			1.588
<b>Total</b>	<b>47.559</b>	<b>9.421</b>	<b>7.006</b>	<b>63.986</b>

<b>Third Party Contributions</b>	<b>0.015</b>	<b>0.000</b>	<b>0.000</b>	<b>0.015</b>
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#### Council Resources

Revenue Contributions	49.757	0.950	0.000	50.707
General Fund Capital Resources	14.925	1.521	0.872	17.318
<b>Total</b>	<b>64.682</b>	<b>2.471</b>	<b>0.872</b>	<b>68.025</b>

<b>Total Resources Required to Fund Capital Programme</b>	<b>131.235</b>	<b>19.695</b>	<b>14.700</b>	<b>165.630</b>
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<b>Difference Total Spend to Total Resources</b>	<b>0.000</b>	<b>0.000</b>	<b>0.000</b>	<b>0.000</b>
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## **RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

### **CABINET**

**21<sup>st</sup> FEBRUARY 2024**

### **NON-DOMESTIC RATE (NDR) RELIEF SCHEMES 2024/25**

#### **REPORT OF THE DEPUTY CHIEF EXECUTIVE AND GROUP DIRECTOR OF FINANCE, DIGITAL & FRONTLINE SERVICES IN DISCUSSION WITH THE RELEVANT PORTFOLIO HOLDER (CLLR T LEYSHON)**

**Author(s): MR MATTHEW PHILLIPS, HEAD OF SERVICE (REVENUES & BENEFITS)**

#### **1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide Cabinet with:

- a) Details of the Welsh Government Non-Domestic Rates (NDR) – Retail, Leisure and Hospitality Rate Relief (RLH) Scheme for 2024/25.
- b) Details of the Council’s local business rate reduction scheme.
- c) Details of new Non-Domestic Rate reliefs available to qualifying business rate payers from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2024.

#### **2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

2.1 It is recommended that Cabinet:

- a) Note the details of the Welsh Government (WG) RLH Scheme and formally adopt the scheme for the year 2024/25.
- b) Note the continuation of the proposed local Business Rate Reduction Scheme for 2024/25.
- c) Note the new Non-Domestic Rate reliefs available to qualifying business rate payers from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2024.

#### **3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

3.1 To ensure that qualifying businesses benefit from the RLH scheme and the local business rate reduction scheme for the whole of the financial year 2024/25 (in relation to business rate payments) and that Cabinet adopt the RLH scheme and are aware of the new reliefs for qualifying business rate payers.

#### **4. BACKGROUND**

4.1 In March 2020, in response to the growing concerns about the impact of the COVID 19 pandemic on the economy in Wales, WG published details of a financial support package for businesses, which included a new temporary business rates relief scheme.

- 4.2 The WG scheme, the Retail, Leisure and Hospitality Rate Relief scheme has provided much needed support to qualifying businesses, in line with a laid down criteria, since the 2020/21 financial year. Alongside, Cabinet also agreed to provide additional rate relief through a Local Business Rate Relief Scheme during this period to those qualifying businesses. Members will note that for the current financial year, 2023/24, Cabinet agreed a scheme that would provide additional rate relief of up to £500 to a qualifying business.
- 4.3 As of 1<sup>st</sup> January 2024, over £2.9M of RLH relief had been provided to over 450 qualifying businesses and £133K of local rate relief to 402 businesses for the financial year 2023/24.

## **5. RETAIL, LEISURE AND HOSPITALITY (RLH) RATES RELIEF IN WALES SCHEME**

- 5.1 On 19<sup>th</sup> December 2023, WG announced the RLH scheme for 2024/25 recognising that businesses and other ratepayers are continuing to experience pressures in the current economic climate and set out its continued commitment to supporting businesses to recover from the impacts of on-going economic challenges.
- 5.2 The RLH scheme for 2024/25 will provide 40% rates relief (currently 75%) for the next financial year and is aimed at businesses and other ratepayers in Wales in the retail, leisure and hospitality sectors, such as shops, pubs, restaurants, gyms, performance venues and hotels.
- 5.3 The scheme aims to provide support for eligible occupied properties by offering a discount of 40% on the non-domestic rates bill of all eligible premises. The scheme will apply to all eligible ratepayers but the overall value of RLH relief that can be allowed (across Wales) is £110,000 per business.
- 5.4 The list of the types of businesses able to qualify for the relief is set out at Appendix 1 with those non-qualifying businesses set out at Appendix 2. One of the key qualifying criteria is that the property (hereditament) is used for the provision of goods and / or services to visiting members of the public.
- 5.5 As the scheme is a temporary measure, WG are providing the relief by reimbursing Councils who use their discretionary relief powers under Section 47 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988. It will be for individual Councils to adopt the scheme and determine awards in each individual case under Section 47. The WG will reimburse local authorities for the relief that is provided in line with this guidance via a grant under Section 31 of the Local Government Act 2003 and Section 58A of the Government of Wales Act 2006.
- 5.6 In line with WG requirements, businesses will need to make an application to the Council for the RLH relief to be assessed and applied to their NDR bill and it should be noted that the RLH scheme is subject to subsidy controls under the Subsidy Control Act 2022 which means that ratepayers must declare that they do not breach subsidy limits as a result of receiving RLH.

## **6. LOCAL BUSINESS RATE REDUCTION SCHEME**

- 6.1 In order to further support our Retail, Leisure and Hospitality businesses in 2024/25 it is proposed that the local discretionary relief continues to be provided of up to a maximum of £500 per qualifying business. This is in **addition** to the WG RLH scheme.
- 6.2 The qualifying criteria of the RLH scheme shall be applied. It is estimated that 500 businesses in Rhondda Cynon Taf would benefit from this further support.
- 6.3 In cases where the “net” rates bill (following the award of RLH and any other applicable reliefs) is less than £500, the rates bill will be reduced to zero.
- 6.4 Subject to an application and eligibility for RLH, the Council will also award up to £500 local discretionary relief. Businesses will then receive an adjusted Non Domestic Rates bill, net of RLH relief and the Local Business Rate relief.
- 6.5 It is noted that there are no planned changes to the WG’s Small Business Rate Relief Scheme.
- 6.6 The financial implications of the Local Business Rate Reduction Scheme have already been factored into the Council’s Medium Term Financial Plan and Revenue Budget.

## **7. NEW NON-DOMESTIC RATES RELIEF SCHEMES**

- 7.1 Following consultation exercises, WG announced two new schemes that would be available to qualifying business ratepayers from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2024. These reliefs are:

### **(a) Improvement Relief**

The WG recognises that many businesses see the NDR system as a disincentive to investing in property improvements, as any resulting increase in a property’s rateable value may lead to a higher bill. Improvement relief has been introduced to help address this potential barrier to growth and investment in the tax-base, from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2024.

The relief is intended to support ratepayers investing in improvements to their non-domestic properties which will support their business, by providing relief from the effect of a resulting rateable value increase on their NDR liability for a period of 12 months.

A detailed guidance note is available for ratepayers.

[Non-Domestic Rates – Improvement Relief | Business Wales \(gov.wales\)](#)

### **(b) Heat Networks Relief**

The Welsh Government is committed to decarbonisation and net-zero goals. Heat networks relief has been introduced to help support the growth in the low-carbon area of this sector that is anticipated over the next decade.

Heat networks supply thermal energy from a central source to consumers, through a network of pipes. They vary considerably in their scale and use, from a common heating system in a building with multiple occupiers, to large standalone networks providing heat or power to many customers and buildings across a large area. The WG is providing full (100%) relief to non-domestic hereditaments which are used wholly or mainly as a heat network and supply thermal energy generated from low-carbon sources.

A detailed guidance note is available for ratepayers.

[Non-Domestic Rates – Heat Networks Relief | Business Wales \(gov.wales\)](#)

7.2 Alongside these changes and commitment to financial support for businesses during 2024/25, WG has taken the following action:

- The increase in the NDR multiplier for 2024-25 will be capped at 5%, resulting in a multiplier of 0.562 (subject to approval by the Senedd, 20<sup>th</sup> February 2024). This is lower than the 6.7% increase that would otherwise apply from the default inflation of the multiplier in line with CPI and will benefit all ratepayers who do not already receive full relief.

## **8. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS / SOCIO-ECONOMIC DUTY**

8.1 Due regard has been given to the Council's public sector equality duties under the Equality Act 2010, namely the Public Sector Equality Duty and Socio-Economic Duty.

## **9. WELSH LANGUAGE IMPLICATIONS**

9.1 There are no Welsh language implications as a result of the recommendations in this report.

## **10. CONSULTATION / INVOLVEMENT**

10.1 No consultation was needed on the WG RLH scheme. The Local Business Rate Reduction Scheme has been subject to previous consultation.

## **11. FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)**

11.1 The Council has already included the resource requirement in its Medium Term Financial Plan and proposed 2024/25 Revenue Budget Strategy to fund the local Business Rates Reduction scheme.

11.2 The Welsh Government will reimburse local authorities for the RLH relief that is provided in line with its guidance via a grant under section 31 of the Local Government Act 2003 and section 58A of the Government of Wales Act 2006.

## **12. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED**

- 12.1 The RLH Relief Scheme is in accordance with the Council's statutory powers under Section 47 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988.
- 12.2 For the scheme to be applied in Rhondda Cynon Taf, the Council needs to formally resolve to adopt the scheme locally in exercise of its discretionary powers under section 47(1) (a) of the 1988 Act and the Deputy Chief Executive and Group Director of Finance, Digital and Frontline Services will administer the scheme and make the necessary determinations in accordance with the Council's 'officer scheme of delegation'.

## **13. LINKS TO CORPORATE AND NATIONAL PRIORITIES AND THE WELL-BEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS ACT**

- 13.1 The proposals are aligned to the Council's Corporate Plan priorities and the well-being goals, as set out within the Well-Being of Future Generations Act, in particular 'a more prosperous Wales'.

## **14. CONCLUSION**

- 14.1 The adoption of the WG RLH Rate Relief Scheme and the Local Discretionary Business Rates Relief Scheme will provide further much needed financial support for local businesses to meet their 2024/25 rate liability and forms part of a wider package of support intended to create and maintain vibrant town centres across Rhondda Cynon Taf, which is something that this Council has committed to in its Corporate Plan.
- 14.2 The introduction of the new relief schemes relating to improvements of business premises and heat networks aim to encourage development and improvements to existing buildings, as well as providing full rates relief to those facilities that are wholly or mainly heat networks and supply thermal energy generated from low-carbon sources.

## Appendix 1

Examples of the types of retail premises that **may** qualify for assistance under the Wales Retail, Leisure and Hospitality Relief Scheme:

### **Hereditaments that are being used for the sale of goods to visiting members of the public**

- Shops (such as florists, bakers, butchers, grocers, greengrocers, jewellers, stationers, off-licences, newsagents, hardware stores, supermarkets, etc)
- Charity shops
- Opticians
- Pharmacies
- Post offices
- Furnishing shops or display rooms (such as carpet shops, double-glazing, garage doors)
- Car or caravan showrooms
- Second hand car lots
- Markets
- Petrol stations
- Garden centres
- Art galleries (where art is for sale or hire)

### **Hereditaments that are being used for the provision of the following services to visiting members of the public**

- Hair and beauty services
- Shoe repairs or key cutting
- Travel agents
- Ticket offices (e.g. for theatre)
- Dry cleaners
- Launderettes
- PC, TV or domestic appliance repair
- Funeral directors
- Photo processing
- DVD or video rentals
- Tool hire
- Car hire
- Estate and letting agents

### **Hereditaments that are being used for the sale of food and / or drink to visiting members of the public**

- Restaurants
- Drive-through or drive-in restaurants
- Takeaways
- Sandwich shops
- Cafés
- Coffee shops
- Pubs
- Bars or Wine Bars

We consider assembly and leisure to mean the following.

**Hereditaments that are being used for the provision of sport, leisure and facilities to visiting members of the public (including for the viewing of such activities) and for the assembly of visiting members of the public**

- Sports grounds and clubs
- Sport and leisure facilities
- Gyms
- Tourist attractions
- Museums and art galleries
- Stately homes and historic houses
- Theatres
- Live Music Venues
- Cinemas
- Nightclubs

**Hereditaments that are being used for the assembly of visiting members of the public**

- Public halls
- Clubhouses, clubs and institutions

We consider hotels, guest and boarding premises, and self-catering accommodation to mean the following.

**Hereditaments where the non-domestic part is being used for the provision of living accommodation as a business**

- Hotels, Guest and Boarding Houses
- Holiday homes
- Caravan parks and sites

## **Appendix 2**

Examples of the types of retail premises that **will not** qualify for assistance under the Retail, Leisure and Hospitality Rates Relief Scheme:

### **Hereditaments that are being used wholly or mainly for the provision of the following services to visiting members of the public**

- Financial services (eg banks, building societies, cash points, ATMs, bureaux de change, payday lenders, betting shops, pawnbrokers)
- Medical services (eg vets, dentists, doctors, osteopaths, chiropractors)
- Professional services (eg solicitors, accountants, insurance agents, financial advisers, tutors)
- Post Office sorting offices
- Day nurseries
- Kennels and catteries
- Casinos and gambling clubs
- Show homes and marketing suites
- Employment agencies

### **Hereditaments that are not reasonably accessible to visiting members of the public**

If a hereditament is not usually reasonably accessible to visiting members of the public, it will be ineligible for relief under the scheme, even if there is ancillary use of the hereditament that might be considered to fall within the descriptions listed under Appendix 1.

### **Hereditaments that are not occupied**

Properties that are not occupied on 1 April 2024 should be excluded from this relief. However, under the mandatory Empty Property Rates Relief scheme, empty properties will receive a 100% reduction in rates for the first three months (and in certain cases, six months) of being empty.

### **Hereditaments that are owned, rented or managed by a local authority**

Hereditaments owned, rented or managed by a local authority, such as visitor centres, tourist information shops and council-run coffee shops or gift shops attached to historic buildings, are exempt from this scheme.



**Other Information:-**

***Relevant Scrutiny Committee:***

Overview and Scrutiny

***Contact Officer – Matthew Phillips***

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972**

**AS AMENDED BY**

**THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985**

**RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**CABINET**

**21<sup>st</sup> FEBRUARY 2024**

**REPORT OF THE DEPUTY CHIEF EXECUTIVE AND GROUP DIRECTOR OF FINANCE,  
DIGITAL & FRONTLINE SERVICES IN DISCUSSION WITH THE RELEVANT  
PORTFOLIO HOLDER (CLLR T LEYSHON)**

Item:

**NON DOMESTIC RATE (NDR) RELIEF SCHEMES 2024/25**

**Background Papers**

**NONE**

Officer to contact:

**MR MATTHEW PHILLIPS, HEAD OF SERVICE (REVENUES & BENEFITS)**

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

### **CABINET**

**21<sup>ST</sup> FEBRUARY 2024**

### **REGULATION OF INVESTIGATORY POWERS ACT 2000 (RIPA) and INVESTIGATORY POWERS ACT 2016 (IPA) - USE OF INVESTIGATORY POWERS DURING 2023 BY RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF LEGAL & DEMOCRATIC SERVICES AND  
DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC HEALTH, PROTECTION & COMMUNITY SERVICES IN  
DISCUSSION WITH THE DEPUTY LEADER, CLLR WEBBER**

**Author(s): Judith Parry, Trading Standards & Registrar Service Manager**

#### **1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

The purpose of the report is to enable Members to review:

- 1.1 The Council's use of the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 (as amended) (RIPA) for the period 1<sup>st</sup> January to 31<sup>st</sup> December 2023; and
- 1.2 The Council's use of the Acquisition of Communications Data under the Investigatory Powers Act 2016 (IPA) for the same period.

#### **2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is recommended that the Cabinet:

- 2.1 Note the content of the report; and
- 2.2 Acknowledge that investigatory powers in respect of covert surveillance and acquisition of communications data have been used in an appropriate manner that is consistent with the Council's RIPA and IPA policies during the period 1<sup>st</sup> January – 31<sup>st</sup> December 2023.

#### **3 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 3.1 To ensure Members are kept apprised as to how RIPA has been used during the period 1<sup>st</sup> January – 31<sup>st</sup> December 2023 and that it has been used in an appropriate manner consistent with the Council's RIPA policies.

- 3.2 The Cabinet is responsible for providing oversight for effective and appropriate use of specific investigatory powers under the Council's Corporate RIPA and IPA Policies.
- 3.3 The Cabinet is responsible for approving revisions to the Council's Corporate RIPA Policy in order to ensure that it remains both accurate and fit for purpose.

#### **4. USE OF RIPA BY THE COUNCIL: 1<sup>ST</sup> JANUARY TO 31<sup>ST</sup> DECEMBER 2023**

##### **Directed Surveillance and the use of Covert Human Intelligence Sources**

###### **New Authorisations**

- 4.1 During the period 1<sup>st</sup> January – 31<sup>st</sup> December 2023 there were no authorisations in respect of directed surveillance. During the same period, there were no authorisations for the use of covert human intelligence sources.
- 4.2 Directed surveillance authorisations can be issued where it is necessary and proportionate in order to prevent or detect crime, or prevent disorder, where at least one of the offences is punishable by a maximum term of imprisonment of at least six months or more or relates to the underage sale of alcohol or tobacco/nicotine.
- 4.3 Such matters are still being investigated by council service areas. It is now more common that overt investigative methods are considered as a first step, and only if the use of overt methods will not result in evidence collation, is covert investigation considered.

###### **Authorisations extant as at 1<sup>st</sup> January 2023**

- 4.4 There were no directed surveillance authorisations that were carried forward from the previous calendar year (2022). Similarly, no authorisations in respect of a Covert Human Intelligence Source extant remain extant.

###### **Authorisations extant as at 1<sup>st</sup> January 2024**

- 4.5 No authorisations have been carried forward into 2024.

###### **Human Rights Act Authorisations**

- 4.6 At the commencement of an investigation, officers may need to carry out non-overt work which does not fall within the statutory requirements for RIPA, predominantly because the work is carried out in a manner that there

is little likelihood of obtaining private information (collateral intrusion). The use of non-overt enforcement techniques are assessed to ensure that they are carried out in compliance with the requirements of the Human Rights Act 1998 (HRA). Such assessments are recorded on a Human Rights Act consideration form, whereby the necessity, proportionality and purpose of the activity are addressed, precautions are introduced to minimise collateral intrusion and the use of the technique is approved by a senior manager.

4.7 If this preparatory investigative work carried indicates that an investigation needs to be carried out using RIPA-based techniques, officers will apply for RIPA authorisation.

4.8 During the period of this report, the HRA authorisations were:

<i>Anti-social behaviour monitoring</i>	0
<i>Underage sales test purchasing</i>	3
<i>Proxy sales monitoring</i>	0
<i>Social media site monitoring</i>	19
<i>Vehicle test purchasing</i>	0

4.9 In respect of underage sales test purchasing, the figure of 3 in the table relates to the number of days that operations were conducted. This represents 45 attempted purchases, predominantly for vapes but included fireworks during quarter 3. Premises are targeted based on intelligence received.

4.10 During this period, one age-restricted product was supplied from the 45 attempts; this was a nicotine content vape. A simple caution was signed by the seller; no action was taken against the business as they demonstrated that they had met the statutory defence. All premises visited are reminded of their legal responsibilities in respect of underage sales.

4.11 This period shows a reduction in respect of social media site monitoring. Such sites are predominantly monitored for investigations into sale of illegal product via social media; it has been noted that a greater number of traders (both genuine and fraudulent) are trading over media that the council does not have access to. This may have contributed to the reduced number.

4.12 Increasingly, legitimate businesses trade solely via social media, and may use their personal social media presence to advertise and sell their products. In these instances, it is important to ensure that collateral intrusion is minimised when that site is 'inspected' in the same way that a high street shop may be inspected for legal compliance of goods or services supplied.

- 4.13 Whilst monitoring through social media may initially be considered intrusive, in many instances it can lead to a level of remote interaction between service areas and businesses that results in more timely resolution to enquiries.
- 4.14 A review of HRA authorisations show that on no occasion did they result in an improper infringement of a person's human rights.

### **Communications Data**

- 4.15 During the reporting period, no applications for communications data were submitted via the National Anti-Fraud Network (NAFN) in relation to telephone numbers used as part of fraudulent activity.

## **5 AUDIT BY THE INVESTIGATORY POWERS COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE (IPCO)**

- 5.1 The IPCO conduct audits on the use of covert investigatory powers on a 3-year cycle. The previous audit was on 7<sup>th</sup> September 2020.
- 5.2 On 7<sup>th</sup> July 2023, the IPCO contacted the Chief Executive to advise that they would no longer routinely undertake an inspection as part of the audit process, but request a written update from the local authority, which will then inform a need for a remote or in-person inspection. Ten questions were posed, and a request to provide copies of applications and authorisations since the last audit. The relevant information and copies of three authorisations were duly supplied.
- 5.3 On 27<sup>th</sup> November 2023, a letter was received from the Rt. Hon. Sir Brian Leveson, Investigatory Powers Commissioner. The letter stated that the information received provides assurance of ongoing compliance with legal requirements, and no further inspection is due as part of that audit cycle. A copy of this letter is provided at Appendix A.

## **6 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS / SOCIO-ECONOMIC DUTY**

An equality impact assessment is not needed as the content of this report is for information purposes only.

## **7 WELSH LANGUAGE IMPLICATIONS**

Both RIPA and IPA policies are available on the Council website in Welsh.

**8**      **CONSULTATION / INVOLVEMENT**

This report has been prepared in consultation with the Council's Trading Standards and Registrar Service Manager who is responsible for operational oversight of RIPA matters.

**9**      **FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)**

There are no financial implications aligned to this report.

**10**     **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED**

The Regulations of Investigatory Powers Act (RIPA) and the Investigatory Powers Act (IPA) place a duty on local authorities to ensure that identified activity is compliant with legal controls and subject to annual scrutiny. Associated Home Office Codes of Practice require a local authority to have up to date and accurate procedures in place to ensure that the legal requirements are complied with. These procedures must be made public.

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

The use of RIPA and IPA as tools to effectively target illegal activity within the local authority, such as rogue trading and fly-tipping, links to two of the three Corporate Priorities, namely ensuing PLACES where people are proud to live, work and play, and enabling PROSPERITY for people and business to fulfil their potential and prosper.

Additionally, four of the seven Well-being Goals under the Well-being of Future Generations Act are met, namely a Prosperous Wales, a Healthier Wales, a More Equal Wales and a Globally Responsible Wales.

**12**     **STRATEGIC OR RELEVANT TO ELECTORAL WARDS**

The contents of this report are not specific to any one electoral ward.

**13**     **CONCLUSION**

The Senior Responsible Officer (Director of Legal & Democratic Services) considers that RIPA has been used appropriately in relation to the use of directed surveillance and acquiring of communications data as identified in this report; and that RIPA has been used in a manner that is consistent with the Council's Corporate Policies.

**Other Information:-**

**Relevant Scrutiny Committee:** Overview Scrutiny

**Contact Officer:** Andy Wilkins, Head of Legal – Corporate and Democratic Service



## APPENDIX TO REPORT



PO Box 29105, London  
SW1V 1ZU

Mr Paul Mee  
Chief Executive  
Rhondda Cynon Taf Council  
By email: [paul.mee@rctcbc.gov.uk](mailto:paul.mee@rctcbc.gov.uk)

27 November 2023

Dear Mr Mee,

IPCO recently contacted your council to request information concerning the use of covert investigatory powers. Your colleague Andrew Wilkins, Director of Legal Services provided a comprehensive response in his capacity as Senior Responsible Officer. I am satisfied that your reply provides your assurance that ongoing compliance with the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 and the Investigatory Powers Act 2016 will be maintained. As such, your Council will not require further inspection this year.

Mr Wilkins kindly provided copies of authorisation bundles relating to three uses of directed surveillance powers during 2020, two of which were authorised prior to our last inspection and cancelled soon after, and a further authorisation granted shortly after the inspection. The documentation was examined and found to be in good order. All three cases related to the deployment of static covert cameras in locations that had been used for fly tipping to gain evidence of vehicles used to facilitate these events. All three cancellations were submitted promptly; however, I would like to remind you that paragraph 5.14 of the Covert Surveillance and Property Interference Code of Practice (2018) states that any authorisation should be cancelled when it is deemed as no longer

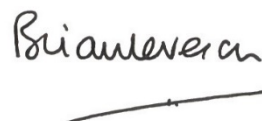
necessary. While the cancellation documents provide the Authorising Officer with a helpful update, all appear to be cancelled shortly prior to their expiry without an explanation of whether this was an advisable course of action, and without further information concerning the duration of the deployment (i.e., the date of commencement of observations and removal of cameras). I understand that RIPA powers of any description have not been used since 2020.

I am pleased to confirm that the actions highlighted in the 2020 Inspection Report were promptly acted upon. The report suggested that the number of nominated Authorising Officers be reduced in number. A copy of the relevant RIPA annual update to Council Members has been provided, evidencing that the list of AOs was significantly reduced. Furthermore, Mr Wilkins has confirmed that all present AOs have either completed RIPA refresher training or are due to do so in the very short term.

I would ask that you ensure that the key compliance issues continue to receive the necessary internal governance and oversight through yourself and your Senior Responsible Officer: policy refreshes; annual updates to your Elected Members; ongoing training and awareness raising; internal compliance monitoring by lead managers within their business areas; and the retention, review and destruction (RRD) of any product obtained through the use of covert powers (Records and Product Management in accordance with the Safeguards Chapters of the relevant Codes of Practice).

Your Council will be due its next inspection in 2026, but please do not hesitate to contact my Office if IPCO can be of assistance in the intervening period.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Brian Leveson". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above a horizontal line.

**The Rt. Hon. Sir Brian Leveson**  
The Investigatory Powers Commissioner

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

### **CABINET**

**21<sup>ST</sup> FEBRUARY 2024**

### **THE COUNCIL'S CORPORATE SAFEGUARDING POLICY**

#### **REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE IN DISCUSSIONS WITH THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL, CLLR ANDREW MORGAN OBE**

**Author(s): Paul Mee**

#### **1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to seek Cabinet approval of the revised Corporate Safeguarding Policy.

#### **2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is recommended that the Cabinet:

- 2.1 Note the information contained in the report;
- 2.2 Note the feedback provided by the Overview & Scrutiny Committee which met on 29<sup>th</sup> January 2024;
- 2.3 Subject to 2.1 and 2.2, approve the new Corporate Safeguarding Policy, presented at Appendix I.

#### **3 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 3.1 Safeguarding and protecting children and adults from harm is a priority for the Council. The Corporate Safeguarding Policy provides a framework for every service across the Council, setting out responsibilities and expectations in relation to safeguarding children and adults. This policy applies to all our employees, elected members, volunteers and suppliers/service providers delivering service on behalf of the Council.
- 3.2 The policy is reviewed every three years by the Council's Corporate Safeguarding Group to ensure it remains fit for purpose, reflects current legislation and best practice. The policy has been reviewed and revised and a new policy is presented at Appendix I for members consideration, and subject to any amendments, approval prior to dissemination across the Council.

#### 4. **BACKGROUND**

- 4.1 The Council's current Corporate Safeguarding Policy was approved and adopted by Cabinet following consideration at their meeting on 28<sup>th</sup> July 2020. The policy is subject to review every three years to ensure that it remains fit for purpose and to reflect developments in legislation or best practice.
- 4.2 The policy has been reviewed by the Council's Corporate Safeguarding Group, chaired by the Chief Executive, and a revised policy is presented at Appendix I for members consideration.
- 4.3 The policy has been reviewed against the Welsh Government and WLGA Corporate Safeguarding Good Practice Guide and reflects input on current safeguarding best practice from professionals working across the Council, including Children's Services, Adult Services, Human Resources, Procurement, Digital & ICT and others.
- 4.4 The main changes to the policy are summarised as follows:
- The corporate safeguarding framework has been revised to reflect good practice and now has four principal areas of focus:-
  - **Leadership & Culture** – a clear articulation of who this policy applies to and that leadership for safeguarding sits at the highest possible level with the Leader and Chief Executive.
  - **Governance, Scrutiny & Performance Management** – robust governance through the Corporate Safeguarding Group, chaired by the Chief Executive, robust challenge and scrutiny through the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, underpinned by a performance management framework and annual delivery planning cycle.
  - **Professional Practice & Service Standards** – a clear articulation of expectations in relation to professional practice in relation to those working with children and adults at risk and the duty to report that applies to all employees, elected members and those working on behalf of the Council.
  - Service specific safeguarding considerations around licensing, planning, schools and education, procurement, digital and ICT and partnerships.
  - **Workforce, Recruitment & Selection** – clarity of requirements for mandatory training in compliance with the national safeguarding training, learning and development standards and recruitment processes that prevent unsuitable persons from working for the Council.
- 4.5 The policy also includes important information on what to do if you suspect someone is at risk; a revised description of what constitutes abuse and/or exploitation to reflect current professional thinking;

reference to an updated list of related Council policies, and a description of roles and responsibilities.

- 4.6 The new policy is presented at Appendix I for members consideration.

## **5 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS / SOCIO-ECONOMIC DUTY**

- 5.1 An equality impact assessment screening exercise has been undertaken for the policy which indicates that there are no negative impacts upon protected groups. Consequently, there is no need to undertake a full equality impact assessment.

## **6 WELSH LANGUAGE IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 The Corporate Safeguarding Policy, once approved, will be available in Welsh.

## **7 CONSULTATION / INVOLVEMENT**

- 7.1 Consultation and engagement will be undertaken across the Council and with suppliers/service providers as necessary to ensure effective implementation of the new policy. The policy will be published on the Council's website, embedded into relevant Council policies, and incorporated into training and induction programmes.

- 7.2 The Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee pre-scrutinised the policy at its meeting on the 29<sup>th</sup> January 2024 and a letter detailing its feedback was provided to the Cabinet. A copy of the letter can be found at Appendix 2.

- 7.3 A link to the recording of the meeting can be found [here](#).

## **8 FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)**

- 8.1 There are no additional financial implications arising from this report.

## **9 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED**

- 9.1 The proposed Corporate Safeguarding Policy is consistent with and compliant with the legislative framework and guidance that governs safeguarding practice. There are many relevant legislative provisions and guidance documents that concern safeguarding, the most significant of which include the following:

- Wales Safeguarding Procedures,
- Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014,
- Education Act 2002,

- Children Act 1989 and 2004,
- Crime and Disorder Act 1998,
- Mental Capacity Act 2005,
- Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015,
- Housing Act 2004,
- Licensing Act 2003, and
- Human Rights Act 1998

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

10.1 The Council's approach to safeguarding and its corporate responsibilities in this regard, support the Council's priorities as set out in the corporate plan relating to people, place and prosperity. This also supports the two well-being objectives of the Cwm Taf Morgannwg Well-being plan, A more equal Cwm Taf Morgannwg, namely:

- Healthy local neighbourhoods, and
- Sustainable and resilient local neighbourhoods

10.2 At a regional level the Council is part of the Cwm Taf Morgannwg Regional Safeguarding Group. The Council contributes to the development and delivery of an annual strategic plan to ensure that measures are in place to safeguard children and adults at risk across the region.

## **11 CONCLUSIONS**

11.1 The new corporate safeguarding policy has been revised to reflect current best practice and guidance, sets out the Council's expectations of employees, elected members and services/suppliers working for the council and establishes a robust framework within which the Council will continue to strengthen its safeguarding arrangements to keep children and adults safe.

### **Other Information:-**

***Relevant Scrutiny Committee***

**Overview & Scrutiny Committee**

***Contact Officer***

**Paul Mee**

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972**

**AS AMENDED BY**

**THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985**

**RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**Cabinet**

**21 February 2024**

**REPORT OF CHIEF EXECUTIVE IN DISCUSSIONS WITH THE LEADER  
OF THE COUNCIL, CLLR A MORGAN, OBE**

**Item: The Council's Corporate Safeguarding Policy**

**Background Papers**

- a) The Council's Corporate Safeguarding Arrangements – Cabinet – 28<sup>th</sup> July 2020
- b) Local Authority Arrangements to Safeguard Children and Adults at Risk – Cabinet – 25<sup>th</sup> March 2021
- c) Local Authority Arrangements to Safeguard Children and Adults at Risk – Community Services Scrutiny Committee – 24<sup>th</sup> October 2022

Officer to contact: Paul Mee

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# **Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council**

## **Corporate Safeguarding Policy**

**November 2023**

RCT Corporate Safeguarding Policy	Date: November 2023
Review Date: November 2026	Status: Draft pending approval

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# 1 Introduction

- 1.1 Safeguarding is everyone's business whether they work for, or on behalf of, the Council.

**If a child, young person, or adult is in immediate danger, the Emergency Services (Police, Ambulance, Fire and Rescue) must be contacted immediately by calling 999.**

- 1.2 The Council expects all its employees, elected members, commissioned services, suppliers, and contractors to be aware of their safeguarding responsibilities, to be alert to children or adults at risk of harm and to act when they suspect someone is at risk of abuse or harm. Details of what to do if you suspect someone is at risk of harm are set out in Appendix I.
- 1.3 Corporate Safeguarding describes the policy commitment and arrangements that this Council has in place to ensure that all our services and employees play their part in safeguarding and promoting the well-being of children and adults who may be at risk of harm.
- 1.4 The Leader of the Council is the lead elected member and portfolio holder for Corporate Safeguarding. The Council has put in place robust governance for corporate safeguarding through its Corporate Safeguarding Group, chaired by the Chief Executive who is the Council's Safeguarding Champion, and through its wider democratic processes including Scrutiny and Cabinet.

## **What is Safeguarding?**

- 1.5 Safeguarding involves both the protection of children and adults who need care and support from abuse, neglect or other kinds of harm and the prevention of children and adults from becoming at risk of abuse, neglect, or other kinds of harm.
- 1.6 The definitions of a child and adult at risk and the types of harm and/or exploitation are included in Appendix II.

## **Purpose of this Policy**

- 1.7 The safeguarding of children and adults at risk is a priority for Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council.
- 1.8 This Corporate Safeguarding Policy provides a framework for every Service within the Council setting out responsibilities in relation to safeguarding children and adults at

risk as well as the methods by which the Council is assured that it is fulfilling its duties.

- 1.9 This policy applies to all Rhondda Cynon Taf employees, elected members, volunteers, and suppliers/service providers procured to deliver services on behalf of the Council.

### **Principles**

- 1.10 This policy considers the following key principles:

- Every child and adult (whatever their background, culture, age, disability, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, ethnicity, religious belief) has a right to participate in a safe society without any violence, fear, abuse, bullying or discrimination.
- Every child and adult have the right to be protected from harm, neglect, exploitation, and abuse.
- Everyone working for the Council and our elected members have a responsibility to protect children and adults from abuse and neglect and work in a way that promotes and supports their best interests.
- The Council will invest in preventative and early intervention services and is committed to prevent situations arising where abuse, neglect or harm may occur.
- The Council will act in response to any reported safeguarding concerns to ensure children and adults at risk are safe and protected.

## **2 Strategic Context**

- 2.1 At a strategic level, this approach to safeguarding supports the delivery of the Council's well-being objectives as set out in the Corporate Plan. [The Council's Corporate Plan](#)
- 2.2 It also supports the priorities set out in the Cwm Taf Wellbeing Plan and the Cwm Taf Morgannwg Safeguarding Board Strategic Plan. [CTMSB Strategic Plan 2023-2026](#).
- 2.3 At an all-Wales level, keeping people safe contributes to the Wellbeing goals as set out in the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act to improve the economic, social, environmental, and cultural well-being of Wales.

## **3 Related legislation, policy, and guidance**

- 3.1 Legislation that is contained within the various Acts and guidance enshrine the right to

protection from abuse<sup>1</sup>. The legal starting point in achieving this objective is professionals' duty to report<sup>2</sup> allegations of abuse and neglect. The law also identifies the Local Authority as the lead organisation<sup>3</sup> in making enquiries to identify whether an individual is at risk and in coordinating the response to protect. In practice, this is never achieved in isolation or without clear leadership and accountability<sup>4</sup> for the work that is equally set out in law, along with the duty to cooperate and collaborate<sup>5</sup> with others.

3.2 Good practice in safeguarding brings together all activity aimed at promoting safe practice with vulnerable groups and preventing abuse and neglect. Safeguarding is governed by a framework of legislation; the Wales Safeguarding Procedures and is delivered through our corporate policies. The Council has specific policies that support our employees to discharge their safeguarding responsibilities, including those listed at Appendix IV.

3.3 The intention is that this Corporate Safeguarding Policy will supplement and not replace any responsibilities already set out in legislation, policy, or guidance.

## **4 Our Framework**

4.1 The two key objectives of this policy are:

- a) To set out how Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council will meet its obligations towards the safeguarding of children and adults.
- b) To give assurances to the public, elected members, employees, volunteers, and people carrying out work on behalf of the Council that there are sound arrangements in place to safeguard children and adults.

4.2 The Council will implement these objectives via the following framework:

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<sup>1</sup> Human Rights Act 1999 and United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)

<sup>2</sup> Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014

<sup>3</sup> Children Act 1989 and Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014

<sup>4</sup> Children Act 2004

<sup>5</sup> Children Act 1989, 2004 and Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014



### **Leadership & Culture**

- 4.3 Safeguarding is everyone’s business. All the Council’s employees, elected members, commissioned services, suppliers, and contractors are to be aware of their safeguarding responsibilities, to be alert to children or adults at risk of harm and to act when they suspect someone is at risk of abuse or harm.
- 4.4 The Leader of the Council is the lead elected member and portfolio holder for Corporate Safeguarding. The Council has put in place robust governance for corporate safeguarding through its Corporate Safeguarding Group, chaired by the Chief Executive who is the Council’s Safeguarding Champion.

### **Governance, Scrutiny & Performance Management**

- 4.5 The RCT Corporate Safeguarding Group is responsible for ensuring that the Council carries out its responsibilities, as set out in this Corporate Safeguarding Policy. The Group is chaired by the Chief Executive and has membership drawn from across the Council’s core functional responsibilities.
- 4.6 The Council will discharge its wider strategic statutory safeguarding responsibilities through its membership of the Cwm Taf Morgannwg Safeguarding Board (CTMSB). The Board has a statutory duty to develop an Annual Plan [CTMSB Strategic Plan 2023-2026](#) on a regional basis and has an overall responsibility for challenging relevant

agencies in relation to the measures that are in place to safeguard children and adults at risk.

- 4.7 The Council's Democratic process for challenge is its Scrutiny function. The Overview & Scrutiny Committee will receive an annual report describing how the Council has discharged its corporate safeguarding responsibilities. Through its robust performance management arrangements, the Council will be able to demonstrate the impact of its work and be accountable to elected members.

### **Professional Practice & Service Standards**

- 4.8 In undertaking their work for the Council all employees, elected members and service provides/contractors must comply with relevant professional practice requirements, codes of conduct and service standards where they apply.
- 4.9 The Wales Safeguarding Procedures [Safeguarding Wales](#) set out arrangements for responding to safeguarding concerns about;
- those whose work, either in a paid or voluntary capacity, brings them into contact with children or adults at risk.
  - Individuals who have caring responsibilities for children or adults in need of care and support and their employment or voluntary work brings them into contact with children or adults at risk.
- 4.10 These procedures also support the Council's internal disciplinary procedures and provide guidance to deal appropriately with any concerns or allegations of professional abuse, neglect or harm and to ensure that all allegations of abuse made against employees or volunteers working with children, young people and adults at risk are dealt with in a fair, consistent and timely manner.
- 4.11 Children, young people, and adults live, learn, work, play and visit a wide range of settings in their neighbourhoods and communities. The Council with other public bodies will consider the risks that environments may present to children, young people, and adults. Our staff, volunteers and contractors will be the "eyes and ears" of the Council as they go about their jobs. Employees are equipped with safeguarding training, so they have a good basic understanding of what to do if they observe or are concerned about a potential safeguarding risk.
- 4.12 There are several service specific safeguarding considerations across the Council:

## **a) Licensing**

The Council's Statement of Licensing Policy 2020-25 [Licensing Policy](#) set out how the Council will discharge its duties under the Licensing Act 2003, including its expectations of the licensed trade in respect of safeguarding. The Council will carry out its functions with a view to promoting the four licensing objectives. The objectives are: -

- Prevention of crime and disorder,
- Protection of Public safety
- The prevention of public nuisance, and
- The protection of children from harm

The Council works with a wide range of businesses and business leaders across Rhondda Cynon Taff. People working in these businesses may meet children and adults at risk of harm. People who work in these industries may be able to identify signs of exploitation and other forms of abuse. The Council will encourage licensed premises and other businesses to provide safeguarding training for their employees. All taxi drivers licensed by the Council are required to undertake a SQA level 2 certificate, "Introduction to the role of the professional taxi driver and private hire driver", which includes safeguarding training. Safeguarding advice for the taxi trade can be found here: [Safeguarding Advice for the Taxi Trade](#)

## **b) Planning**

The Council in undertaking its planning authority duty will shape and influence where new licensed premises are located, the location of buildings and the design of public spaces to minimise opportunities for people to be harmed.

## **c) Schools and other Education Settings**

Education settings play a key role in safeguarding and each setting will have a Child Safeguarding Policy which is updated annually by delegated representatives on behalf of the Cwm Taf Morgannwg Safeguarding Board and adopted by the Governing Body/Management Committee. Section 175 of the Education Act 2002 requires Local Authorities and Governing Bodies of maintained schools to have arrangements in place to safeguard and promote the welfare of children.



Governing Bodies and school employees must have regard for this guidance when fulfilling their responsibilities for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children. The Welsh Government [Keeping Learners Safe](#) guidance details the responsibilities of Local Authorities, Governing Bodies and proprietors of independent schools.

The Council will support schools in meeting their safeguarding duty through compliance processes including Internal Audit as well as advice and guidance via a dedicated Education function within MASH, and Local Authority Designated Lead Officers.

The Council also support the safeguarding of learners and their families via policies and processes for:

- Children Missing Education
- Child Performance Licensing, Child Employment Permits and Chaperones
- Education Other than at School (EOTAS)

#### **d) Procurement**

In consultation with the relevant service area, the Procurement Service will assess whether the requirements of this Corporate Safeguarding Policy will apply to any new contracting arrangement. Depending on the nature of specific contracts, the level of pre-appointment checks / required governance practices may vary.

- For those contracts where this Policy applies, the Council will have in place appropriate contract management arrangements as detailed in the contract terms and conditions.
- Following the appointment of a supplier / service provider the purpose of contract monitoring arrangements will be to ensure that supplier / service provider is managing their responsibilities as set out to them within the relevant tender documents and contract of engagement.

#### **e) Digital & ICT**

The Council understands that digital provides additional concerns for safeguarding and keeping employees safe using digital systems is a key requirement. Digital safety has become a worldwide risk for users of technology. To address this safeguarding risk the Council has several policies to provide appropriate guidance to employees.

There are several policies and processes that are issued to support the safeguarding of employees and residents.

- All solutions purchased by the authority must undertake a Security Assessment. The assessment evaluates information safety and security against NCSC guidance.
- The Council issues mandatory policies to support safeguarding.
- The Council also monitors and records usage to support safeguarding.

#### **f) Partnerships & Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH)**

The Council will work in partnership through the CTM Regional Safeguarding Board and its associated governance arrangements to ensure that effective measures are in place to safeguard children and adults across the region, challenge partners and provide accountability. The Council commits resources to this regional collaboration and the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) which brings together different agencies to enable fast information sharing with the purpose of making an efficient and informed decision to safeguard children and adults at risk.

### **Workforce, Recruitment & Selection**

- 4.13 The Council will ensure that all employees and elected members understand their responsibilities in relation to safeguarding children and adults. All employees are required to undertake mandatory safeguarding training (children and adults) as well as the level 1 violence against women, domestic abuse, and sexual violence training. Managers must ensure that this training forms part of the induction process for new employees.
- 4.14 The Council has developed a Standards document based on the National Safeguarding Training Standards developed by Social Care Wales, [National safeguarding training, learning and development standards](#) . This sets out the training standards for Safeguarding, required by RCT Council employees and contracted providers, who have a varied range of levels of contact with and responsibility for children and or parents /carers, and adults. These will include those who, in their work or volunteering, have limited contact with children, young people, their parents/carers and adults at risk, but have no specific responsibility for them, to those who have the highest levels of responsibilities for them, including at strategic level.

4.15 The Council will ensure that safe recruitment processes are in place to prevent, wherever possible, unsuitable people from working in or volunteering for certain roles, particularly roles that involve children or adults at risk. This includes:

- Disclosure and Barring Service checks,
- Recruitment and selection training for managers,
- References and checks prior to employment,
- Reviewing recruitment and selection procedures regularly and auditing effectiveness.

## **5 Confidentiality**

5.1 Information sharing is vital for the safeguarding of children and adults at risk. The Council is committed to complying with data protection law which allows it to use and share personal information only where we have a proper and lawful reason for doing so. The Data Protection legislation does not put barriers in place for sharing information but enhances individuals' rights to have their personal information processed fairly, lawfully, and transparently.

5.2 As a matter of good practice employees should inform the child, their parent or adult at risk about their service's policy on how information will be shared and seek consent.

5.3 Confidential information can be shared without consent if it is required by law, or directed by a court, or if the benefits to a child or young person that will arise from sharing the information outweigh both the public and the individual's interest in keeping the information confidential. In practice, where there are concerns that a child or adult at risk may be experiencing abuse or neglect, it will be lawful for that information to be shared. Welsh Government has produced a fact sheet regarding this issue. It can be found at [information sharing to safeguard children and adults](#)

5.4 Employees should seek advice from their Line Manager or Information Management Team if they are in any doubt about sharing personal information.

## **6 Roles and responsibilities**

6.1 All employees, elected members, volunteers and suppliers/service providers (procured to deliver services on behalf of the Council) have the duty to report

concerns about abuse and neglect.

6.2 Children's Services has the responsibility for receiving and responding to new concerns about children and Adult Services has the responsibility for receiving and responding to new concerns about adults at risk. The responsibilities of key roles in the Council are set out in Appendix III:

## **APPENDIX I – What to do if you suspect someone is at risk.**

**If a child, young person, or adult at risk is in immediate danger, the Emergency Services (Police, Ambulance, Fire and Rescue) must be contacted immediately by calling 999.**

All those employed by, or working on behalf of, the Council should be alert to the possibility of abuse. An individual may become concerned about a child or an adult at risk in several ways:

- The person may tell you,
- The person may say something that worries you,
- A third party may voice concerns,
- You may see something that concerns you,

Any person with concerns regarding the safety of a child/adult at risk, **OR** the behaviour of a colleague towards a child/adult at risk, has a responsibility to report this immediately.

01443 425003 (adults) 01443 425006 (children)

E-mail:

[adultsatrisk@rctcbc.gov.uk](mailto:adultsatrisk@rctcbc.gov.uk) (adults)

[IAATeam@rctcbc.gov.uk](mailto:IAATeam@rctcbc.gov.uk) (children)

*After 5.00pm, Monday to Friday and on weekends and Public Holidays contact the Emergency Duty Team on 01443 743665 or email:*

[SocialWorkEmergencyDutyTeam@rctcbc.gov.uk](mailto:SocialWorkEmergencyDutyTeam@rctcbc.gov.uk)

We all have a responsibility to report safeguarding concerns, regardless of a person's status, profession, or authority. Any concerns about the conduct or behaviour of a practitioner/person in a position of trust must be reported to social services or the police.

## **APPENDIX II - What constitutes abuse and/or exploitation.**

### **Social Services and Well-being Act 2014 part 7 - Working Together to Safeguard People**

#### **Section 128 of the Act imposes a duty to report adults at risk**

The Act imposes a new duty on relevant partners to report to a local authority if it is suspected that an adult is an adult at risk.

An “adult at risk”, is an adult who:-

- (a) is experiencing or is at risk of abuse or neglect;
- (b) has needs for care and support (whether or not the authority is meeting any of those needs); and
- (c) as a result of those needs is unable to protect himself or herself against the abuse or neglect or the risk of it.

#### **Section 130 of the Act imposes a duty to report children at risk**

The Act defines a ‘child at risk’ as a child who:

- (a) is experiencing or is at risk of abuse, neglect or other kinds of harm; and
- (b) has needs for care and support (whether or not the authority is meeting any of those needs).

Section 197(1) of the Act provides definitions of ‘abuse’ and ‘neglect’:

“**abuse**” means physical, sexual, psychological, emotional or financial abuse (and includes abuse taking place in any setting, whether in a private dwelling, an institution or any other place), and

“**neglect**” means a failure to meet a person’s basic physical, emotional, social or psychological needs, which is likely to result in an impairment of the person’s well-being (for example, an impairment of the person’s health or, in the case of a child, an impairment of the child’s development);

The following is a non-exhaustive list of examples for each of the categories of abuse and neglect:

- **Physical abuse** - hitting, slapping, over or misuse of medication, physical harm may also be caused by fabricating or inducing an illness, undue restraint, or inappropriate sanctions. The use of physical punishment toward children is now illegal in Wales. [Ending physical punishment in Wales | GOV.WALES](#)
- **Sexual abuse** - rape and sexual assault or sexual acts to which the person has not or could not consent and/or was pressured into consenting;
- **Psychological/Emotional abuse** - threats of harm or abandonment, coercive control, humiliation, verbal or racial abuse, isolation or withdrawal from services or

supportive networks; coercive control is an act or pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation, intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish or frighten the victim

- **Neglect** - failure to access medical care or services, negligence in the face of risk-taking, failure to give prescribed medication, failure to assist in personal hygiene or the provision of food, shelter, clothing; emotional neglect
- **Financial abuse** - Financial or material abuse, including theft, fraud, exploitation, pressure in connection with wills, property or inheritance or financial transactions, or the misuse or misappropriation of property, possessions, or benefits. This will normally only be applicable to adults at risk but may apply to a child in circumstances such as a parent/carer using a child's inheritance in a way that does not contribute to the child's wellbeing.

### **Child Sexual Abuse (CSA)**

Child sexual abuse involves forcing or enticing a child to take part in sexual activities, whether or not the child is aware of what is happening. This includes physical contact, penetrative or non-penetrative acts; non-contact activities including online harm, such as involving children in looking at, or in the production of, pornographic material or watching sexual activities or encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways.

### **Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (VAWDASV)**

The Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015 defines Domestic Abuse as being abuse where the victim is or has been associated with the abuser. The abuse can be physical, sexual, psychological, emotional or financial abuse.

Witnessing domestic abuse is child abuse. It is important to understand that if a child is at risk, action must be taken.

Violence Against Women describes types of abuse and violent acts that are primarily or exclusively experienced by women (also known as gender-based violence).

Sexual Violence is any unwanted sexual act or activity such as sexual exploitation, sexual harassment, or threats of violence of a sexual nature.

### **Suicide and Self Harm**

There is no universal definition of self-harm and different strategies, policies and research use different definitions. The Welsh Assembly Government definition is "the intentional self-poisoning or self-injury irrespective of the nature of motivation or degree of suicidal intent".

Self-Harm behaviour regardless of intent is one of the top five reasons for medical admission in the UK. It is more common in females and the risk of repetition is high – up to 40% will go in to repeat ('Talk to Me 2' Strategy for Wales, 2015-2020).

The Talk to Me 2 Strategy defines suicide as "a death resulting from an intentional self-inflicted act".

Suicide is a major cause of death amongst the 15 to 44 age group in Wales. In 2010-2012,

it accounted for almost one in five deaths ('Talk to Me 2' Strategy, for Wales 2015-2020).

## **Forms of Exploitation**

Provided below are definitions of the different types of exploitation (list is not exhaustive). Please see Wales Safeguarding Procedures for more detailed information and relevant practice guides for more information. [Safeguarding Wales](#)

- **Online Grooming:** Online grooming is term used broadly to describe the tactics abuse deploy through the internet to exploit children. It can happen quickly or over time, but at its core it is a process of exploiting trust to shift expectations of what safe behaviour is and leveraging fear and shame to keep a child silent. It is a difficult but important reality to face so that we can take steps to stop it.

Technology did not create grooming—the process has existed in offline abuse—but the variety of platforms in existence, and the prominence of digital environments in our lives, has increased abusers' reach and opportunity.

Adults seeking to abuse children will go where kids are. As a result, grooming can theoretically happen just about anywhere online.

Predators can reach children in video game chats, possibly creating fictional personas to develop a sense of kinship with victims or portraying themselves as a trustworthy adult in a place where other adults are largely absent.

With the popularity of live streaming across online platforms, an interaction may start as something that feels harmless to the child, such as encouraging specific dance moves to the latest hit or celebrating a new gymnastics routine. However, this type of action can quickly turn into something more concerning when an innocent moment is captured and shared elsewhere online or the interaction continues on over the course of time, with boundaries being pushed along the way.

Perhaps this is why online grooming can also be one of the most challenging issues to understand - it's so varied, and sometimes it feels like it can happen anywhere that children interact with the online world.

- **Sexual Exploitation:** This is a form of sexual abuse. It occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18, or adult with care and support needs, into sexual activity (a) in exchange for something the victim needs or wants, and/or (b) for the financial advantage or increased status of the perpetrator or facilitator. The victim may have been sexually exploited even if the sexual activity appears consensual. Sexual exploitation does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur through the use of technology.
- **Missing people:** The definition of missing:
  - "Anyone whose whereabouts cannot be established will be considered missing until located and their well-being confirmed." (College of Policing, APP)



- There a number of immediate risks associated with going missing, which could include:
- Involvement in criminal activities;
- Victim of abuse;
- Victim of crime, for example through sexual assault and exploitation;
- Alcohol/substance misuse;
- Deterioration of physical and mental health;
- Missing out on education;
- Sexual and financial exploitation as a result of trafficking.

South Wales Police are the lead agency responsible for the initial risk assessment and management of missing person enquiries and the ensuing investigation to locate the person. The College of Policing Authorised Professional Practice (APP) places all missing persons within a continuum of risk ranging from 'no apparent risk' (previously referred to as 'absent'), through to 'high risk' cases requiring immediate, intensive collaborative action. The risk assessment for missing persons is a guide to the appropriate level of response based on initial and ongoing risk assessment in a case. Actively reviewing risk levels on an ongoing basis remains important for all agencies involved to enable them to assess changing circumstances and respond accordingly. While adults can be deemed to be 'no apparent risk' South Wales Police and partners do not deem a child to be 'No apparent risk' or 'Low risk'. Given their age and associated vulnerability they will be classified as either 'Medium' or 'High'.

• **Serious Youth Violence:** There are several definitions that describe 'Serious Youth Violence' but the one element that they all have in common is that they all focus on the **age** of the person involved in the incident and the **gravity** of the offence:

Serious Youth Violence is defined as '*any offence of most serious violence or weapon enabled crime, where the victim is aged 1-19*' i.e. murder, manslaughter, rape, wounding with intent and causing grievous bodily harm. 'Youth violence' is defined in the same way, but also includes assault with injury offences.

Young people associated with gangs are highly vulnerable. Sexual violence amongst peers is commonplace and it is used as a means of power and control over others, most commonly young women. Young people affected by or associated with gangs are at high risk of sexual exploitation and violence and will require safeguarding. Sexual exploitation is used in gangs to exert power and control over members / Initiate young people into the gang / exchange sexual activity for status or protection / entrap rival gang members by exploiting girls and young women and inflict sexual assault as a weapon in conflict.

A gang is defined as 'a relatively durable, predominantly street-based group of young people who: 1. see themselves (and are seen by others) as a discernible group; 2. engage in criminal activity and violence; 3. lay claim over territory (not necessarily geographical but can include an illegal economy territory); 4. have some form of identifying structural feature; and 5. are in conflict with other, similar, gangs.

- **Criminal Exploitation:** Criminal Exploitation occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, control, manipulate or deceive a

child, young person or an adult into any criminal activity: (a) In exchange for something the victim needs or wants, and/or (b) For the financial or other advantage of the perpetrator or facilitator (such as to support serious organised crime and/or terrorism), and/or (c) Through violence or the threat of violence to ensure compliance. The victim may have been criminally exploited even if the activity appears consensual. Criminal Exploitation does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur using technology and/or social media. Because they are more likely to be easily detected, individuals who are exploited are more likely to be arrested and criminalised for criminal behaviour, than those individuals or groups who are exploiting them. Individuals who are being criminally exploited can be involved, linked to or considered to be (by themselves or others) as part of a “gang”. It is important when children or adults identify or are identified as being affected or involved with gang-related activity that involves the use of actual or threatened violence and/or drug dealing that professionals also consider that they may be victims of criminal exploitation. Criminal exploitation is broader than but often part of organised crime and county lines.

- **Organised Crime & County lines:** Organised Crime is “serious crime planned, coordinated and conducted by people working together on a continuing basis. Their motivation is often, but not always, financial gain.” Organised crime groups are “organised criminals working together for a particular criminal activity or activities.” County lines is a term used to describe gangs and organised criminal networks involved in exporting illegal drugs into one or more importing areas within the UK, using dedicated mobile phone lines or other form of “deal line”. They are likely to exploit children and adults to move, [locally supply] and store the drugs and money. They will often use coercion, intimidation, violence (including sexual violence) and weapons.
- **Cuckooing:** This term is “named after the nest stealing practices of wild cuckoos. It describes the situation where a county lines dealer ‘takes over’ accommodation located in the provincial drugs market, using it as a local dealing base.” (Coomber and Moyle: 2017) An individual or group can do this by taking over the homes of local adults and families through an abuse of power or vulnerability by coercion, control and/or force so that they can provide a base for the supply of drugs into the local community. This places the adult and/or families at an increased risk of eviction (if they are in social or privately rented housing) and isolation from their communities due to the anti-social activity it can create. Cuckooing often forms part of wider ‘county lines’ activity and is also a form of criminal exploitation.
- **Modern Slavery:** Modern slavery is the illegal exploitation of people for personal or commercial gain. It covers a wide range of abuse and exploitation including sexual exploitation, domestic servitude, forced labour, criminal exploitation and organ harvesting. Victims of modern slavery can be any age, gender, nationality and ethnicity. They are tricked or threatened into work and may feel unable to leave or report the crime through fear or intimidation. They may not recognise themselves as a victim.
- **Human Trafficking:** Article 3 of the Palermo Protocol (2000) defines trafficking as follows: “Trafficking of persons” shall mean the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position

of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs.

### **Harmful practices related to tradition, culture, religion, or superstition**

- **‘Honour’ Based Abuse:** The concept of ‘honour’ is a deeply held belief within many families and communities and those who are perceived to dishonour their family or community by their behaviour can be subject to abuse, emotional abuse and death. ‘Honour’ crime involves abuse and/or violence, including murder, committed by people who want to defend the reputation of their family or community. It can also take the forms of intimidation, coercive control or blackmail. Honour killing is the murder of a person accused of "bringing shame" upon their family.
- **Forced Marriage:** Forced marriage is an unacceptable cultural practice; it is child abuse and a form of violence against women and girls. Forced marriage is illegal in the UK. For the purpose of the criminal law in England and Wales, forced marriage is one which occurs without the full and free consent of one or both parties. Forced Marriage can involve both males and females.
- **Female Genital Mutilation:** Female Genital Mutilation is also known as Female Circumcision or Female Genital Cutting (FGC) and is a traditional cultural practice. The procedure causes severe short and long term health consequences, including difficulties with childbirth, causing danger to the mother and child and mental health problems. FGM has no health benefits, and it causes significant harm. It involves removing and damaging healthy and normal female genital tissue and interferes with the natural functions of girls' and women's bodies. Generally speaking, the health risks increase with increasing severity of the procedure, although the psychological effects may be similar whether or not the procedure is physically severe.

**Prevent/Extremism:** ‘Extremism’ is defined in the 2011 Prevent Strategy as vocal or active opposition to fundamental British values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs. We also include in our definition of extremism calls for the death of members of our armed forces, whether in this country or overseas. ‘Violent Extremism’ is defined by the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) as:

“The demonstration of unacceptable behaviour by using any means or medium to express views, which:

- “Encourage, justify or glorify terrorist violence in furtherance of particular beliefs;
- Seek to provoke others to terrorist acts;
- Encourage other serious criminal activity or seek to provoke others to serious
- criminal acts:
- Foster hatred which might lead to inter-community violence in the UK.”

There are a number of offences that can be considered when dealing with violent extremism. They include offences arising through spoken words, creation of tapes and

videos of speeches, internet entries, chanting, banners and written notes and publications. The main offences employed to date have been soliciting murder and inciting racial hatred.

'Radicalisation' refers to the process by which a person comes to support terrorism and extremist ideologies associated with terrorist groups. Radicalisation is usually a process not an event.

### **APPENDIX III – Relevant Council Policies**

- Whistle-Blowing Policy,
- Recruitment & Selection Policies,
- Dealing with Domestic Abuse & Sexual Violence,
- Regional Safeguarding Board Policies and Procedures for Safeguarding children, young people, and adults at risk,
- Cwm Taf Morgannwg Schools Safeguarding Policy,
- Social media policy,
- Information Security Policy
- Data Protection Policy
- Security Incident and Event Reporting
- Internet and Email Acceptable Use Policy
- Acceptable use of Office 365 Teams v1.2
- Office 365 Teams Live Events Protocol
- Password Management Standard

## APPENDIX IV – Roles & Responsibilities

ROLE IN THE COUNCIL	RESPONSIBILITIES
<p><b>Lead Member for Corporate Safeguarding - the Leader of the Council</b></p>	<p>The Lead Member will work closely with and take professional advice from a range of Senior Officers within the Authority, as appropriate.</p> <p>The Lead Member will liaise and consult with other Cabinet Members on individual matters likely to affect their portfolios as set out in the Council’s Scheme of Delegation.</p>
<p><b>The Chief Executive</b></p>	<p>To act as the ‘champion’ for Corporate Safeguarding.</p> <p>Ensure that there are effective safeguarding arrangements in place, including policies and procedures, that those policies and procedures are implemented, that there are effective governance arrangements in place and that all statutory requirements are being met.</p> <p>Work with the Council's Statutory Director for Social Services to ensure there are effective arrangements to safeguard and protect children and adults at risk across the Council. Specifically to:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• monitor the implementation of and compliance with this Policy across the Council</li> <li>• ensure that there is a corporate safeguarding training programme in place</li> <li>• set clear lines of accountability,</li> <li>• ensure that there are lead safeguarding managers within each service area</li> <li>• ensure that the Council implements the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.</li> <li>• ensure that annual service reports are prepared</li> <li>• ensure that the annual corporate safeguarding report for Scrutiny is delivered</li> </ul>
<p><b>Statutory Director of Social Services</b></p>	<p>This role, as defined by the Social Services and Well-Being Act 2014, is fulfilled by the RCT Director of Community and Children’s Services and has the final and indivisible accountability to safeguard children and adults at risk. The annual service reports will be an opportunity for challenge and used to inform the ‘Director of Social Services - Annual Report’.</p>

	<p>Work with the Council's Chief Executive to ensure there are effective arrangements to safeguard and protect children and adults at risk across the Council. Specifically to:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• monitor the implementation of and compliance with this Policy across the Council</li> <li>• ensure that there is a corporate safeguarding training programme in place</li> <li>• set clear lines of accountability</li> <li>• ensure that there are lead safeguarding managers within each service area</li> <li>• ensure that the Council implements the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.</li> <li>• ensure that annual service reports are prepared</li> <li>• ensure that the annual corporate safeguarding report for Scrutiny is delivered</li> </ul>
<p><b>Directors, Service Directors and Heads of Service</b></p>	<p>Through their Management Teams, will be responsible for ensuring that all the statutory requirements in terms of safeguarding children and adults at risk are addressed. They are also responsible for putting in place appropriate systems within their service areas that ensure compliance with this policy:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensuring appropriate training is delivered.</li> <li>• Communicating information about who employee need to contact and making sure this information is reviewed regularly so that is up to date and accurate.</li> <li>• Compiling a report in respect of their Safeguarding arrangements that will be used to inform the Director of Social Services' Annual Report.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Managers</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recruiting employees/volunteers in accordance with relevant HR policy, including (where required) Disclosure and Barring Service checks.</li> <li>• Ensuring safeguarding is part of every employee/volunteer's induction.</li> <li>• Identifying employees/volunteers who are likely to come into contact with children or adults at risk as part of their role.</li> <li>• Ensuring training is delivered commensurate with role.</li> <li>• Ensuring that all employees/volunteers are aware of how to report safeguarding concerns and to whom</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide advice to employees/volunteers on how to report a safeguarding concern</li> <li>• Ensuring that all employees/volunteers are aware of the Council's Whistleblowing Policy</li> <li>• Ensuring that employees/volunteers are aware that they must conduct themselves in a manner which safeguards and promotes the wellbeing of children, and adults at risk.</li> <li>• Providing employees/volunteers with guidance about reporting safeguarding concerns as required.</li> </ul>
<b>Service Commissioners</b>	Ensure that contractual arrangements specify responsibilities in relation to safeguarding in accordance with this policy and existing commissioning policies.
<b>Contractors, sub-contractors or other organisations funded by, or on behalf of, the Council</b>	Arrange checks through the Disclosure and Barring Service (where required) and ensure that their employee comply with regulatory and contractual arrangements relating to safeguarding children and adults at risk. Contractors are also responsible for informing relevant managers of the Council about any concerns they may have and to refer such safeguarding concerns to the MASH.
<b>Elected Members</b>	<p>Should attend training in respect of safeguarding children and adults at risk and additional safeguarding training needs, e.g. in relation to their portfolios will be addressed as part of ongoing Personal Development Reviews.</p> <p>Should report any safeguarding concerns in accordance with this Policy.</p>
<b>Employees</b>	<p>Should attend training in respect of safeguarding children and adults at risk and additional safeguarding training needs, e.g. in relation to their portfolios will be addressed as part of ongoing Personal Development Reviews.</p> <p>Should report any safeguarding concerns in accordance with this Policy.</p>





30 January 2024

**Re: Pre-Scrutiny of the Local Authority's arrangements to Safeguard Children and Adults at Risk**

Dear Cabinet Members

I have been instructed by this Council's Overview & Scrutiny Committee to convey the comments and observations of Members in relation to the Local Authority's arrangements to Safeguard Children and Adults at Risk

The Overview & Scrutiny Committee had the opportunity to pre-scrutinise the arrangements at its meeting on the 29<sup>th</sup> January 2024. Members undertook a constructive discussion in respect of the proposals. The Members' comments are summarised below.

Reassurance was sought around the Council's Corporate Safeguarding responsibilities in relation to lone working which now extends to office workers, as well as those who worked alone in their day to day role prior to the pandemic and urged that there are no delays to the lone working policy and any training being rolled out to staff.

A Member sought clarity on how the new arrangements will be communicated to schools to ensure they adopt the latest guidance to revise their own policies. The Committee were reassured to hear that arrangements through the Corporate Safeguarding Steering Group ensure that there is clear line of communication with all schools to ensure they receive the necessary guidance and support.

A Member referred to the Forms of Exploitation section in the report and referenced that Hate Crime is listed under this section, which they did not consider is a form of exploitation or a protected characteristic. The Member also added that the protected characteristics were not accurate and recommended that further guidance on this was sought before being adopted.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee were grateful for the opportunity to pre-scrutinise the arrangements. A copy of the recording of the meeting can be found [here](#)

Yours sincerely,



Christian Hanagan  
**Service Director Democratic Services and Communications**  
**Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council**