



**RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL
FINANCE AND PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

21st OCTOBER 2021

ENGAGEMENT ON THE COUNCIL'S BUDGET 2022/23

**REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES AND
COMMUNICATION, CHRISTIAN HANAGAN IN DISCUSSION WITH THE
RELEVANT PORTFOLIO HOLDER, CLLR M WEBBER.**

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1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to inform Members of the Finance and Performance Scrutiny Committee of the proposed approach to resident engagement and consultation in respect of the 2022/23 budget setting process.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Members:

- 2.1 Support an online approach to the Council's budget consultation for 2022/23, using the Council's new Let's Talk Engagement website along with the re-introduction of some face-to-face events in the community. As part of the suggested approach, we will continue to provide alternative means of engagement for those having reduced or no access to the Internet and those who prefer to engage through traditional methods.
- 2.2 Support the Council's statutory requirements regarding consultation on the Council Tax Reduction Scheme and Council Tax levels will be met via the proposed approach.
- 2.3 Support the budget consultation process taking place during the autumn of 2021, with the dates to be confirmed following clarification of the Welsh Government budget settlement timescales.

- 2.4 Support the Service Director – Democratic Services & Communications to plan the necessary timeline of engagement once the details of the Provisional Local Government Settlement are known, in consultation with the appropriate Cabinet Member & Director of Finance & Digital Services.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 To provide residents with the opportunity, via a range of methods, to provide feedback to the Cabinet on the 2022/23 budget setting process.

4. BACKGROUND

- 4.1 In previous years the Council has undertaken a comprehensive approach to its annual budget consultation, involving a large number of residents and key stakeholders.
- 4.2 The approach has included a wide range of face-to-face events in the community across the County Borough, as well increased social media and digital engagement. Over 1,000 people were involved in last year's "digital by default" 2021/22 budget consultation process.
- 4.3 The widespread approach we use and the range of views we capture provides senior managers and Cabinet with the necessary information they need to inform budget setting for the year ahead. In addition, we have found that the information we collect is also valuable for service managers to use for their service planning and development.
- 4.4 The COVID-19 pandemic and the challenges it has brought have presented a unique set of circumstances for engagement and consultation. Face-to-face engagement is starting to return, with the relevant precautions in place.
- 4.5 The 2022/23 annual budget consultation will include a number of methods. We will continue to focus on a digital approach, using our new Let's Talk Engagement platform, that has been successfully introduced through our ongoing climate Change Conversation. We will also ensure that the engagement is inclusive for those having reduced or no access to the Internet and those who prefer to engage through traditional methods. We will re-introduce a number of face-to-face engagement events in the community.
- 4.6 It is therefore proposed that the approach outlined in section 5 below is utilised for the 2022/23 budget consultation process

5. PROPOSED ENGAGEMENT APPROACH

- 5.1 The 2022/23 budget consultation will take place in 2 phases. The first phase will take place in the autumn of 2021 and will aim to collect views on investment priorities, council tax levels and efficiency savings. This will enable the Cabinet to consider the feedback received whilst developing a draft Budget Strategy for 2022/23. Phase 2 will take place early in the New Year and will engage with residents on this draft strategy. The specific dates are dependent on the release dates of the Welsh Government Settlement.
- 5.2 The approach will be mainly virtual through the Let's Talk online engagement platform, but will also include a number of face-to-face events and provide a number of alternative methods to ensure that it is inclusive of those who are not online or would rather provide their views in a different way;
- 5.3 The use of the Let's Talk platform, will provide a user friendly and interactive form of engagement. The "Let's Talk Budget" project will be able to provide key information, documents, graphics and videos to outline the background to the Council's budget, in addition to a number of engagement tools to allow feedback, which may include online polls, a survey, an interactive mapping tool, ideas and stories.
- 5.4 Social media will be used to communicate the key messages to residents and service users and encourage engagement and feedback regarding the Council's budget and investment areas.
- 5.5 An online survey will be developed on the Let's Talk site to collect responses on Council investments, Council Tax levels and the Council Tax Reduction scheme.
- 5.6 Emails will be distributed to all key stakeholders (including the Council's Citizens' Panel, Councillors, staff etc.).
- 5.7 A number of face-to-face engagement events will be planned, using the Council's recycling trailer, where we can outline the budget approach, answer questions and collect views. The events will allow the public to speak to Cabinet Members and senior officers about Council services and the budget in general.
- 5.8 Engagement will also take place with the following;
 - Older people via the Older Persons Advisory Group meeting
 - Young people via Rhondda Cynon Taf's Youth Forums. (Instagram).

- A presentation and discussion with young people via our schools/colleges.
- Report and presentation to the Finance and Performance Scrutiny Committee and the School Budget Forum.
- A presentation at the Community Liaison Committee
- Disability forum engagement
- Armed Forces and Veterans Groups engagement.

5.9 As already stated it is important to continue to consider those having reduced or no access to the Internet and those who prefer to engage through traditional methods.

- A telephone Consultation option will be put in place, working with the Council's Contact Centre – The contact centre number will be made available for people to discuss their views or as a minimum to request consultation materials.
- Individual call backs if required. For example, some of the members of the Disability Forum have requested phone calls to provide their views on past consultations.
- Paper surveys and information available on request.
- Consultation freepost address for postal responses.
- Easy Read/Plan English Documents – These will still need to be produced and placed online as well as being available in paper copy on request.

5.10 In addition to the above, all members have had opportunity over recent months at Cabinet and through Full Council to engage in the ongoing work on the Council's Medium Term Financial Planning arrangements.

Council Tax, Council Tax Reduction Scheme and Investment Priorities

5.11 The proposed approach will ensure the Council's duty to consult regarding Council Tax and the Council Tax Reduction Scheme are met as well as providing residents and service users with the opportunity to feedback on the Council's investment priorities.

6. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS / SOCIO-ECONOMIC DUTY

6.1 As noted in section 5, there will be a range of options for all to get involved in the budget consultation. The consultation will also involve the Council's Disability Forum.

6.2 The online Let's Talk platform is accessible on mobile phones and tablet devices, and residents without internet access or smart

phone/tablet devices can request a hard copy of the budget consultation questionnaire.

7. WELSH LANGUAGE IMPLICATIONS

7.1 All consultation materials and the Let's Talk platform will be bilingual.

8. CONSULTATION / INVOLVEMENT

8.1 The recommendations outlined in the report seek to ensure a range of engagement opportunities are provided to residents and service users as part of the budget consultation process.

9. FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)

9.1 There are no financial implications directly aligned to this report.

10. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED

10.1 The Council has a statutory duty to consult on Council Tax and the Council Tax Reduction Scheme which will be met under the approach to budget consultation outlined in this report.

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

11.1 The budget setting process clearly impacts on the delivery of all Council services and contributes in turn to the delivery of the Council's Corporate Plan.

12. CONCLUSION

12.1 The comprehensive approach undertaken in the last few years has led to increased engagement in the budget consultation process through a more interactive and varied approach.

12.2 The COVID-19 pandemic brings challenges for public engagement and consultation, especially in Rhondda Cynon Taf where we have developed a very successful face to face approach with residents. We will be re-introducing some form of face-to-face engagement events, in addition to the new Let's Talk Engagement platform, which will allow residents to be more informed and engage more interactively.

12.3 The approach outlined seeks to continue our positive ongoing conversations, by ensuring that all residents and service users have every opportunity to provide feedback.

12.4 The results of the consultation will be presented to senior officers and Cabinet Members early in the new year to inform the construction of a proposed 2022/23 Revenue Budget Strategy.

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