



Dewch i
siarad RhCT
Let's talk
RCT

Appendix 5



BUDGETCONSULTATION**2022/23** (PHASE 1)

RHONDDA CYNON TAF CBC
DECEMBER 2021



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- This section provides a summary of the main findings from the Phase 1 Budget Consultation 2022/23.
- The consultation was conducted in-house and ran from the 26th October to 7th December 2021.
- The following methods were used to consult with stakeholders: online survey and other engagement tools via the Let's Talk Budget website; a series of outdoor events with "Quick Poll" questions being asked; online presentations and discussions with community and school groups; social media posts; email invitations to take part. These are explained in Section 3, Methodology.
- 247 full survey responses were received, with a further 472 responses to "Quick Poll" responses and 10 contributions to an open-text "Ideas" function on the website.
- Respondents were generally in favour of a Council Tax increase level of 2.65%, but by a narrower margin than in previous years (52% in survey and 65% in polls, compared to 76.8% overall in 2021/22).
- 72% of respondents agreed that the Council should provide sufficient resources to fully cover increased pay and non-pay costs in our schools.
- 87% of respondents agreed that the Council should continue to prioritise social services as a key area for additional investment.
- 51% of respondents agreed that fees and charges in RCT should be raised by the rate of inflation, whilst 37% believed any increase should be lower than the rate of inflation.
- Respondents were provided with a list of Council services and asked to choose which services they felt should be protected and prioritised for any additional resources in 2022/23. The top five services that respondents most wanted to **protect and prioritise** were
 - Children's Social Care Services (94.12%)
 - Public Health (91.38%)
 - Adult Social Care Services (89.83%)
 - Schools (84.62%)
 - Waste and Recycling Services (81.25%)
- 86% of respondents agreed with the Council's approach to efficiencies and 89% said that we should continue to expect our managers to deliver more efficient services.

- 77% of respondents stated that the Council should continue with its strategy on reserves.
- Respondents were asked if they thought the Council should invest in a number of service areas. The majority of respondents agreed with investment across all areas, with the most support being shown for Flood Alleviation (91.29%), Recycling and the Environment (86.42%), Empty Properties (80.66%) and Climate Change (80.00%).
- Over 1000 people took part in the various engagement activities carried out during the consultation Phase 1.

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This report presents the findings of the Phase 1 Budget Consultation 2022/23.
- 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 from the consultation activities carried out on the Let's Talk Budget website.
- 1.5 Section 5 outlines the engagement that took place with young people.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Council undertakes a comprehensive approach to its annual budget consultation, involving a large number of residents and key stakeholders.
- 2.2 The widespread approach we use and the range of views we capture provides senior managers and Cabinet Members with the necessary information they need to set the budget for the year ahead. In addition, we have found that the vast amount of information we collect can also be valuable for service managers to use for their service planning and development.
- 2.3 The Council's [Medium Term Financial Plan](#) has been used as a basis of planning our 2022/23 budget strategy consultation processes.
- 2.4 This report presents the findings of phase 1 of the budget consultation, where views were sought on:
 - level of Council Tax increase

- the resources allocated to our schools
 - the Social Care Budget
 - fees and charges levels
 - protection and prioritisation of services for additional resources
 - delivering more efficient services
 - Council priorities, investment opportunities and Council reserves; and
 - Council Tax Reduction Scheme
- 2.5 Phase 1 of the Council's budget consultation ran from 26th October to the 7th December 2021.
- 2.6 Phase 2 of the consultation will commence in January 2022 and will seek to obtain views on the proposed Budget Strategy for 2022/23.

3. METHODOLOGY

- 3.1 The 2022/23 budget consultation has 2 phases. This report presents the results of the first phase. Phase 1 of the Council's budget consultation ran from 26th October to the 7th December 2021 and aimed to collect views on investment priorities, council tax levels and efficiency savings. This report will be presented to Cabinet and Officers to consider the feedback received whilst developing a draft Budget Strategy for 2022/23. Phase 2 will take place in the New Year and will engage with residents on this draft strategy.
- 3.2 The consultation approach used the new [Let's Talk](#) online engagement platform, which provides a user friendly and interactive form of engagement. The "[Let's Talk Budget](#)" project provided key information, key dates, 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 included online polls, a survey and an ideas tool.
- 3.3 Social media was used to communicate the key messages to residents and service users and encourage engagement and feedback regarding the Council's budget and investment areas.
- 3.4 An email was sent to a range of key stakeholders to promote the consultation.
- 3.5 A number of outdoor face-to-face engagement events were re-introduced this year, after a temporary absence due to the pandemic. The Council's recycling trailer was used and Officers were on hand to outline the budget approach, answer questions and collect views. The following engagement events took place during the consultation:

Ynysangharad War memorial Park, Pontypridd	17th November
Aberdare Town Centre	24th November
Co-op, Treorchy	1st December

- 3.6 As with last year's "digital by default approach" we continued to consider those having reduced or no access to the Internet and those who prefer to engage through traditional methods.
- A telephone Consultation option is now in place for all Council consultations, through the Council's Contact Centre. The option allows people to discuss their views or as a minimum to request consultation materials.
 - Individual call backs on request.
 - Consultation freepost address for postal responses.
- 3.7 We also produced a plain English document of the budget documents, online and available on request.
- 3.8 A discussion and presentation was held with the Older Persons Advisory Group (OPAG).
- 3.9 The consultation was also promoted to other groups, including the Disability Forum, Community Hubs and through Veterans Groups.
- 3.10 We used a number of methods to engage with young people, including online meetings with 3 secondary schools - St. John Baptist Church in Wales High School, Y Pant Comprehensive School and Treorchy Comprehensive School. The sessions were attended by members of the Consultation Team along with a finance officer. During the sessions the young people were shown a video outlining the budget challenges followed by a short presentation with discussion prompts and questions from the full budget consultation.
- 3.11 Budget content was also created and shared on the YEPS Instagram account through polls and stories. The Council's Budget Content was also shared by YEPS' Facebook account.
- 3.12 The Council's Finance and Performance Scrutiny Committee and School Budget Forum were consulted (the minutes of which have not been included in this report).
- 3.13 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.
- 3.14 1,100 people were engaged in the phase 1 budget consultation.

4 Let's Talk Budget

- 4.1 The following section outlines the results from the main consultation activities, including those carried out on the Let's Talk Budget website.
- 4.2 There were three ways for page visitors to engage with the consultation. Firstly, the full survey, with questions provided by the Finance department of RCT. Secondly, a series of "Quick Poll" questions, which were based on a selection of questions from the main survey. Finally, there was an "Ideas" tool available, where respondents were invited to provide longer, free-text responses to a prompt.

Survey Results

- 4.3 A total of 247 completed surveys were received, including the results from a small number of paper copies which were completed and handed in to RCT staff. For the purposes of this report, any blank responses to individual questions have been discounted. Therefore, all percentages quoted are a percentage of the total responses for that individual question.

Schools Budget

- 4.4 72% of respondents agreed that the Council should provide sufficient resources to fully cover increased pay and non-pay costs in our schools.

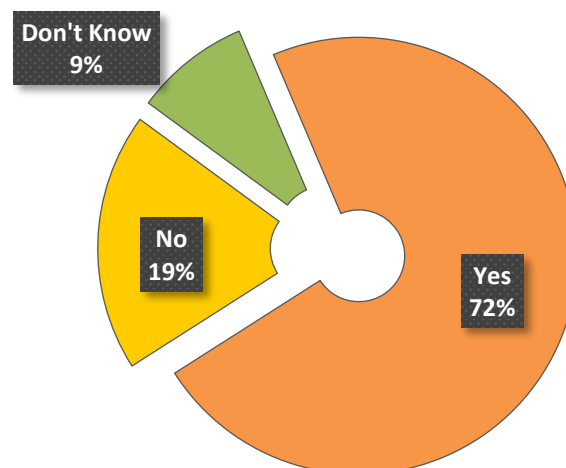


Figure 1 - Schools Budget Increase

Social Care budget

4.5 87% of respondents agreed that the Council should continue to prioritise social services as a key area for additional investment.

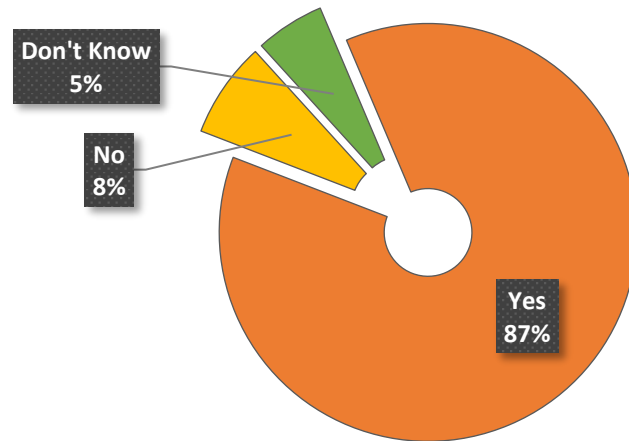


Figure 2 - Prioritisation of Social Services for additional investment

Fees and Charges

4.6 51% of respondents agreed that fees and charges in RCT should be raised by the rate of inflation, whilst 37% believed any increase should be lower than the rate of inflation.

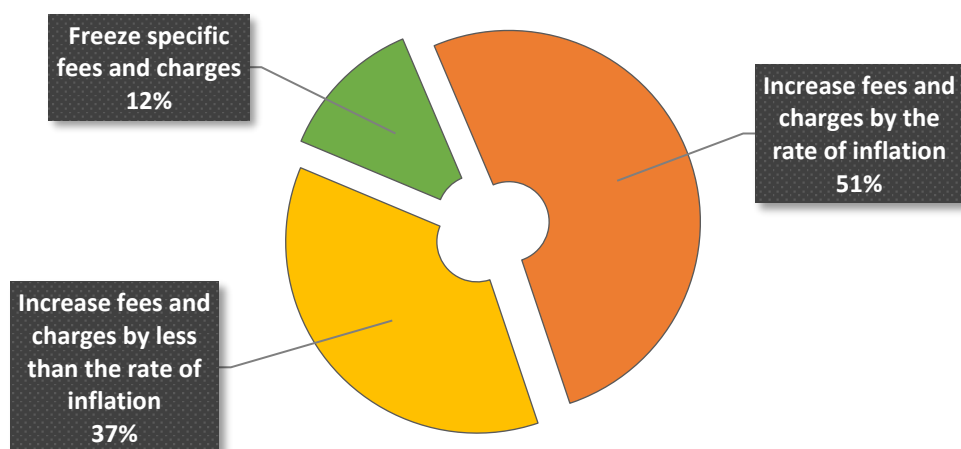


Figure 3 – Increases to Fees and Charges

Overall

“Appreciate that income from fees and charges contribute greatly to the council’s budget but with no pay increases for the majority of people and cuts in benefits then I question the affordability for residents and their capability to pay an increased amount.”

“I think fees and charges need to take into account household income, some people will be more affected by increased fees than others”

“Review each fee/charge on its own merit, as raising some will not prove as efficient or welcomed as raising others.”

“We must realise tha(t) decent services must be paid for.”

Leisure

“Free access to pupils on free school meals - and their families to help them to feel good about themselves by having access to leisure they cannot always afford”

“The council has to charge but where possible support sports clubs who provide places for adults and children to take part in sport, most clubs are run by volunteers who give much time for free, additional cost could tip some clubs over the edge and have to fold”

“It is difficult to encourage people to make more use of facilities such as leisure and sports if the fees keep going up. People are trying to be more healthy, so they should be frozen for leisure.” (OPAG Member).

Parking Charges

“Car parking charges need to be looked at, I understand drawing people into town centres but free parking??? Surely every revenue stream needs to be looked at?”

“Car parking in Pontypridd should not rise. We need to be encouraging people not to go out of town.”

“Car parking charges are a barrier to independence as they make it harder for lower income people to access town centre facilities” (OPAG Member).

The full text of all comments received in the consultation are available for Cabinet and Officers to view.

Council Services

4.10 Respondents were provided with a list of Council services and asked to choose which services they thought should be protected and prioritised for

any additional resources in 2022/23 and those that should not be protected. The results are shown in the graph and table below:

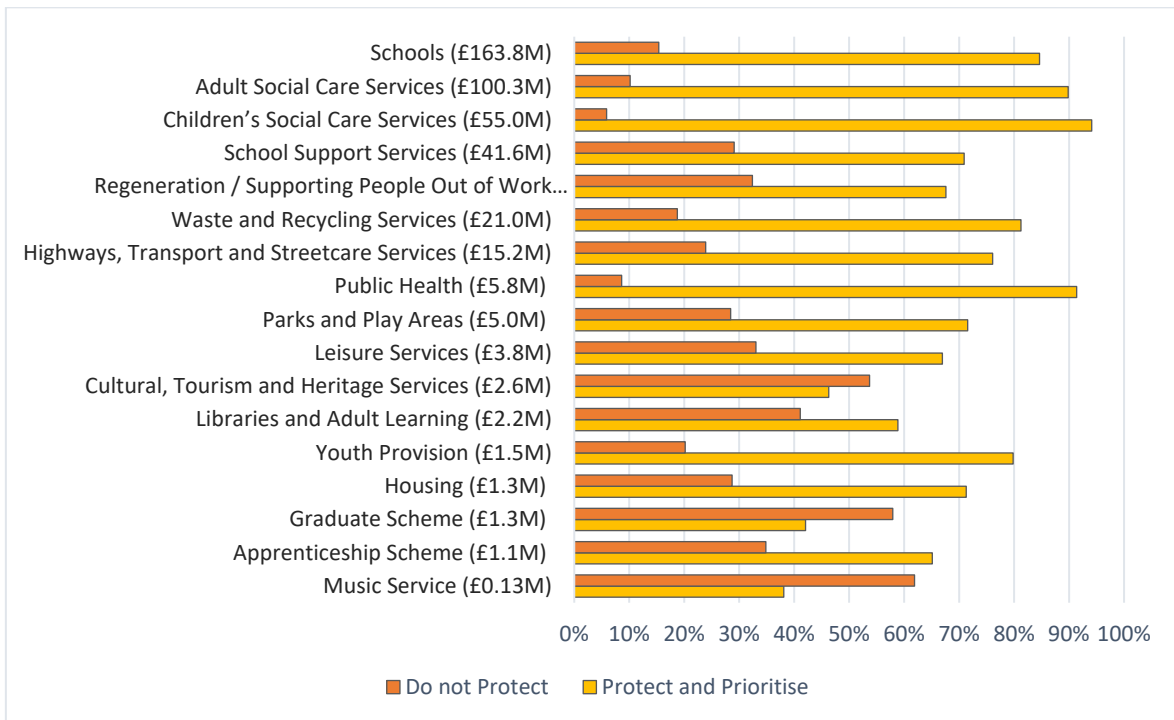


Figure 5 – Services to be Protected and Prioritised

	Protect and Prioritise	Do not Protect
Schools (£163.8M)	84.62%	15.38%
Adult Social Care Services (£100.3M)	89.83%	10.17%
Children's Social Care Services (£55.0M)	94.12%	5.88%
School Support Services (£41.6M)	70.91%	29.09%
Regeneration / Supporting People Out of Work (£28.2M)	67.59%	32.41%
Waste and Recycling Services (£21.0M)	81.25%	18.75%
Highways, Transport and Streetcare Services (£15.2M)	76.11%	23.89%
Public Health (£5.8M)	91.38%	8.62%
Parks and Play Areas (£5.0M)	71.56%	28.44%
Leisure Services (£3.8M)	66.96%	33.04%
Cultural, Tourism and Heritage Services (£2.6M)	46.30%	53.70%
Libraries and Adult Learning (£2.2M)	58.88%	41.12%
Youth Provision (£1.5M)	79.82%	20.18%
Housing (£1.3M)	71.30%	28.70%
Graduate Scheme (£1.3M)	42.06%	57.94%
Apprenticeship Scheme (£1.1M)	65.14%	34.86%
Music Service (£0.13M)	38.10%	61.90%

Table 1: Services to be Protected and Prioritised

4.11 Almost all the services listed had a majority of respondents agreeing that they should be prioritised and protected with the exception of the following 3 services:

- Music Service (61.90% **do not** protect)
- Graduate Scheme (57.94% **do not** protect)
- Cultural, Tourism and Heritage Services (53.70% **do not** protect)

The Graduate Scheme has not appeared on the list of Council Services separately in the past budget consultations. However, from comments in previous years, in combination with the responses to later questions in the survey (please see point 4.28) it is apparent that there are lower levels of support for the Graduate Scheme than other council services. In contrast, the Apprenticeship Scheme still has large support (65.14%), indicating a more positive feeling about its delivered outcomes.

OPAG members suggested that the apprenticeship scheme needs protecting as young people need the skills and opportunities they could develop from it. They also suggested that there needs to be a balance between the Graduate scheme and the Apprenticeship scheme to make sure as many people as possible are included, *“if more apprentices are helped by the same amount of money, maybe phase out Graduate scheme for a year or two to provide more apprentice places”*.

4.12 The five services that respondents most wanted to **protect and prioritise** were

- Children’s Social Care Services (94.12%)
- Public Health (91.38%)
- Adult Social Care Services (89.83%)
- Schools (84.62%)
- Waste and Recycling Services (81.25%)

Council Tax

4.13 Responses to the question “Do you think the Council should increase Council Tax next year by the same amount (2.65%) or less?” were almost evenly split. A narrow majority of 52% of respondents stated that they think Council Tax should be increased by 2.65%, whereas 48% of respondents stated that they believe the increase should be lower.

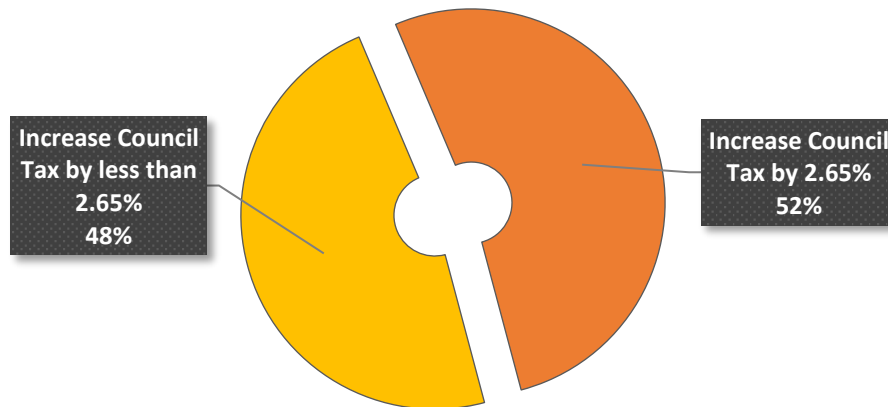


Figure 6 – Council Tax Increase

- 4.14 When asked for any general comments about Council Tax a number of respondents raised concerns that RCT has one of the highest rates in Wales already, despite low annual increases in recent years. Whilst there was general agreement that services rely upon the rate of Council Tax for funding, the majority of comments called for a freeze, reduction or very minimal increase on Council Tax. Some respondents urged that costs be lowered before income is raised, and others raised property banding as an area of concern.

A selection of comments are presented here:

Increase Council Tax by 2.65%

“Council Tax should be increased, although consideration needs to be given to residents where they are not elig(i)ble for Council tax assistance such as reductions, benefits etc and where it may significantly impact on their income.”

“Services need resourcing, they need paying for.”

“2.65% is fair(l)y low and is welcomed after the last 2 years”

“Taking into account the current rise in the cost of living 2.65% would be a fair Percentage with considerations for OAP’s and single Parent family’s”

Increase Council Tax by less than 2.65%

“It seems as a council tax payer we are getting less services primarily due to Covid so don't see why we should be paying more.”

“People have barely survived financially through COVID, you can't make things even more volatile for them.”

“There are already people not being able to pay their rent due to council tax rises in some areas of wales. This may just cause more people at risk of homelessness not being able to pay the increase in all areas of living atm.”

“Council Tax is already a significant monthly cost per month for my household even with both myself and partner working. If it can be reduced/not increased by too much it would help so much.”

Other

“Going by repair of walls, walkways and pavements[...] (many elderly using these). Nothing done after numerous requests. Would consider increase if these issues addressed.”

“The council should re look at the banding. E.g., / Should consider how many occupants live in house. Why should one household with 6+ residents pay the same as 2 residents. 6+ residents create far more rubbish etc. People living in garages, not paying for the services!”

“RCT is amongst the highest in Wales so any increases should be aimed at reducing that position rather than boasting about its individual % increases”

A range of feedback was provided by OPAG members on the level of Council Tax, with a general feeling for a lower increase.

“Wages are not rising as fast as cost of living, and people are still recovering from covid-19 impacts, so Council Tax should be kept down to off-set this.”

“I can see it has to go up, but not quite as much, maybe about 2%.”

“The increase in pension is lower.”

Efficiencies

- 4.15 Respondents were provided with the following statement regarding efficiencies and asked whether they thought this was a good strategy.

“Each year in balancing our budget and ensuring the effective use of resources, all our service managers are required to contribute toward a council-wide efficiency (savings) target. This means that all of our services are becoming more efficient without impacting on front line services, and, over the past decade in excess of £100M of savings have been delivered that represents a reduction of 19% of the Council’s budget.”

- 4.16 The majority of respondents thought this was a good strategy (86%) and 89% said that we should continue to expect our managers to deliver more efficient services in the future.

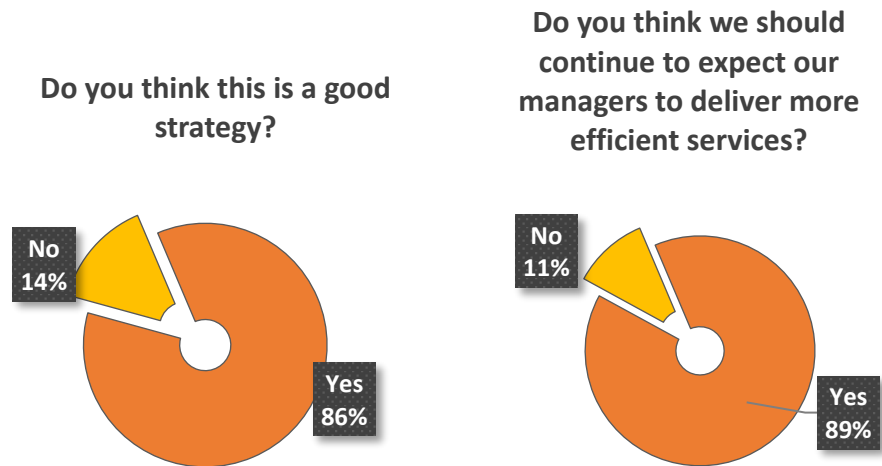


Figure 7 – Efficiency Strategy Agreement

- 4.17 Respondents were then asked if they had any suggestions for greater efficiencies within the Council, or examples of ways in which the Council is not currently as efficient as it could be. The word cloud/map below provides a simple illustrated snapshot of some of the key themes in the comments received.
- 4.18 The major theme that appeared in a high proportion of comments was Council staff working from home and what could be done with empty or very underoccupied Council buildings as a result. In general, respondents seem to be in favour of home/ agile working in future, without a return to full office occupancy, as a key efficiency measure. Combined with this, a number of comments received suggest selling or leasing Council-owned buildings as an income generation strategy.
- 4.19 In general, the majority of comments related to Council staffing and organisational policies, including Councillor expenses, senior management levels, use of consultancy and agency staff. A selection of comments on these and other key themes have been presented in point 4.20.

“So many people are now very successfully working from home I think there should be much more office building rationalisation. There is no need to keep so many council buildings up and running. Town centre hubs I think are an excellent idea.”

“Now it has been proven that quite a lot of staff can work from home, surely some of the buildings could be sold or leased to other businesses if leased agile work”

There was general agreement from OPAG that the Council should continue with remote working, with this and improved technology to cut costs by divesting property/ leasing property/ reducing travel budgets/ hosting more online meetings and so on to be more efficient.

Digitalisation

“move to more digital resident self-serve platforms and become paperless as less uses of Paper systems require so much less admin hours”

“Continue looking into digitalisation and use of data.”

Efficiency Difficulties

“I think efficiency monitoring is important but continued pressure to cut costs can detract from the quality-of-service provision with direct implications for the lives of the children and families we aim to support.”

“Efficiency does not always equate to cheaper and I think that is something that is clear in social services. The closure of services, such as support cafes and art workshops and the belief that existing workers can cover that loss of support is unrealistic, so while it looks like you are getting more from your workers for less money, the service users are the ones having less support and targeted time, which in my view reduces effectiveness and prolongs involvement.”

“The reduction had had a massive affect on the front line and that is how money has been saved.”

Duplication

“Better partnership working amongst certain service areas could reduce duplication of services and result in savings.”

“Areas where there is duplication as it is not an effective use of resources”

“From my own experience more joined up working when dealing with highways issues. E.g., leaf clearance, culverts and drainage and coal tips seemingly involve three different Departments to a common issue affecting the road surface.”

Senior Managers and Councillors

“more front-line staff to provide services and less senior managers”

“Councillor's expenses - extremely excessive indeed - have more remote meetings.”

“cut down on the number of councillors”

“I agree managers should be a major part of the council wide-wide efficiency target, however, to the best of my knowledge, few if any of the service managers have had any formal and recognised training in regard to managerial qualifications (apart from the basic ILM course) which would include being responsible for very large budgets.”

“the payment of expenses to councillors should be reviewed and all unnecessary and duplicated expenses be stopped. Only one councillor should attend a function/meeting.”

Consultants/ Third Parties

“Another area to reduce costs would be to avoid employing consultants to undertake training, surveys and developments, etc. when the authority already has a variety of knowledge, skills and expertise within its existing workforce. Many staff within the council have worked their way up the ladder and are local people, so they are familiar with the needs of the communities, the services and the staff, so they are best placed to address them.”

“Have their own supply agency for staff like the used to, this will save schools money in the long run. The council should not be using outside contractors for day to day running and employ their own staff,”

“Reduce over reliance on agency staff and consultants.”

“Poor staff retention issues in social care are costly due to the need to rely on agency services .”

Council Reserves

- 4.21 Respondents were asked if they think the Council should continue with the Reserves strategy, described as:

“Reserves play an important part of the overall financial management of the Council. The Council's General Reserve balances at 31st March 2021 amounted to £8.5M following an approved in-year overspend of £0.2M for the last financial year (2020/21). The level of general reserves will be kept under on-going review and replenished going forward, as appropriate, and taking into account the financial risks the Council faces.”

- 4.22 77% of respondents agreed that the Council should continue with this strategy.

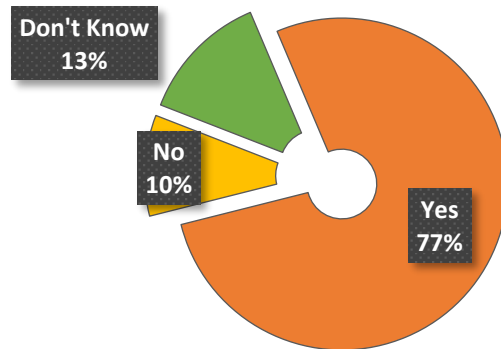


Figure 9 – Council Reserves Strategy

- 4.23 Respondents were invited to give any other comments they have on the budget.

These comments largely built upon themes and trends displayed in the open questions already discussed in this report, although a number of comments were received about council reserves as well as concerns being raised about a drive towards efficiency leading to service and staffing cuts.

Reserves

“8.5 million pounds of RCT residents money is a large amount to be held in reserve the area of RCT could without doubt benefit from the realisation of some of this money back into the community”

“There should be reserves in case of another pandemic or something else that can't be foreseen”

“I think you should explain what 'Council Reserves' are used for in general and practice.”

Efficiency

“Seeking efficiencies from services in isolation may not be sustainable in the longer term as there is a risk the service areas meet the savings target and puts pressure on another area. The savings need to be considered across the service areas including where there is an interdependency. It needs a whole system approach.”

“You can't expect managers to do more with less.....I am a manager for another LA and the increased work against capacity is extraordinarily high. It's not efficiencies, it's cuts.”

Staff/Employment

“The Council should be far more transparent about things like staffing levels/ costs and other hidden things that not everyone understands, to make people realise the budget pressures in full.”

“cut the top peoples pay and raise the pay for the ones that actually do the work for them”

Social Care

“As someone who doesn't have children, nor do I or my family require Social Services support, I do not want to pay more council tax towards this for those who do have children and for those who do require such services.”

“Children's services are overworked and expected more of all the time. This is dangerous and needs priority spending”

“I feel home care domiciliary service should be reviewed as an area it is failing and should be more efficient in keeping people safe”

Other Services

“somewhere for the youth to attend, to keep them occupied, and reduce anti-social behaviour”

“Leisure services, social care, health, and education must be prioritised to protect people's well-being after the pandemic. The Music Service has a tiny budget compared to the overall spend, and must also be protected, as this is a vital part of children's educational experience and contributes to their achievement and well-being well out of proportion to the amount spent on it.

Other

“Continue to invest in new community infrastructure such as new schools, road improvements, our parks, extra care and our town centres. We are seeing a big difference in our communities after an impressive investment programme over the past 5 years or so.”

“I believe, overall the Council are doing a fantastic job in what are exceptionally hard times and need to be commended for doing so. Diolch Yn Fawr iawn”

“Asking staff and residents their views on a regular basis is important so the Council's budget can be reviewed and changed as need be”

“Revenue budgets should come first, maintaining (including future proofing) what you have got is more important than any new projects.”

“Instead of building a library which sits empty a lot of the time, and buildings in Pontypridd town centre that are still to let, why don’t we use this money wisely on more important things. There are plenty of empty shops on the high street for business regeneration so let’s make use of those first.”

The Council’s Priorities

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

Digitalisation *(taking the opportunity new technology provides to deliver better services for residents, visitors, businesses and how we operate internally)*

Commercialisation *(utilising our scale and expertise to deliver services for other organisations and customers and thereby generate income)*

Early Intervention and Prevention *(investing in preventative services to deliver savings in the medium term)*

Independence *(reshaping our services for vulnerable residents to ensure that we promote independence and deliver first class care services)*

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

4.25 Respondents were asked if they thought the Council should focus on these key areas. The majority of respondents agreed with all of the key areas, with the highest response being for Early Intervention and Prevention (90.98%).

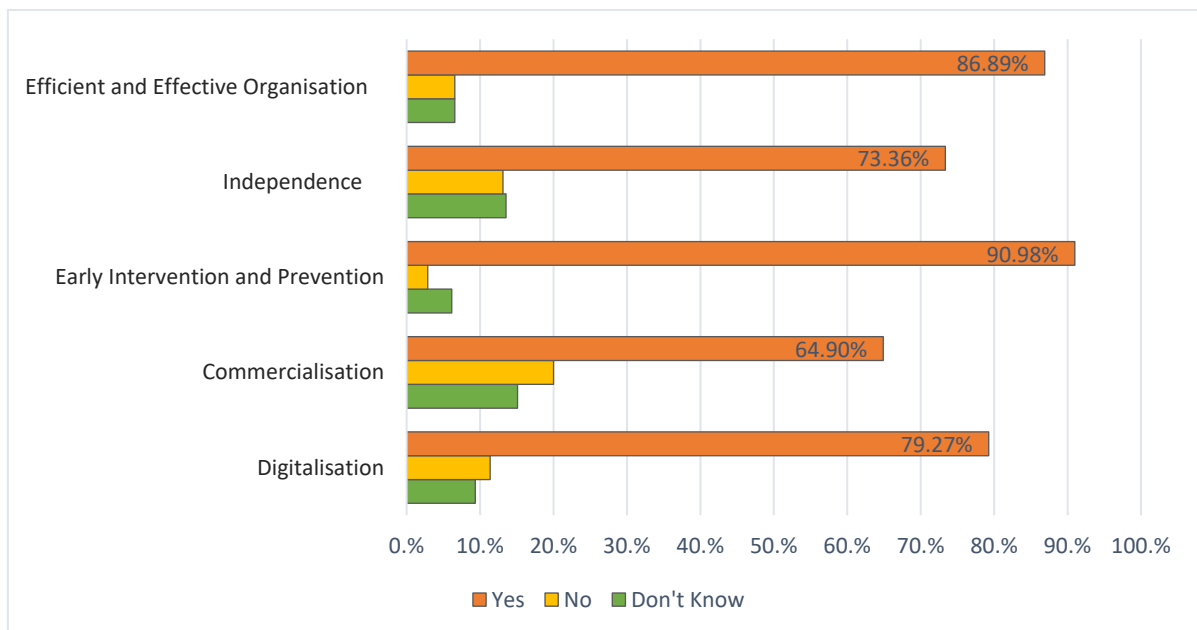


Figure 10 – Council Areas of Focus

	Yes	No	Don't Know
Digitalisation	79.27%	11.38%	9.35%
Commercialisation	64.90%	20.00%	15.10%
Early Intervention and Prevention	90.98%	2.87%	6.15%
Independence	73.36%	13.11%	13.52%
Efficient and Effective Organisation	86.89%	6.56%	6.56%

Table 2: Council Areas of Focus

Council Investment Opportunities

4.26 Respondents were asked if they thought the Council should invest in a number of service areas. The majority of respondents agreed with investment across all areas, with the most support being shown for Flood Alleviation (91.29%), Recycling and the Environment (86.42%), Empty Properties (80.66%) and Climate Change (89%).

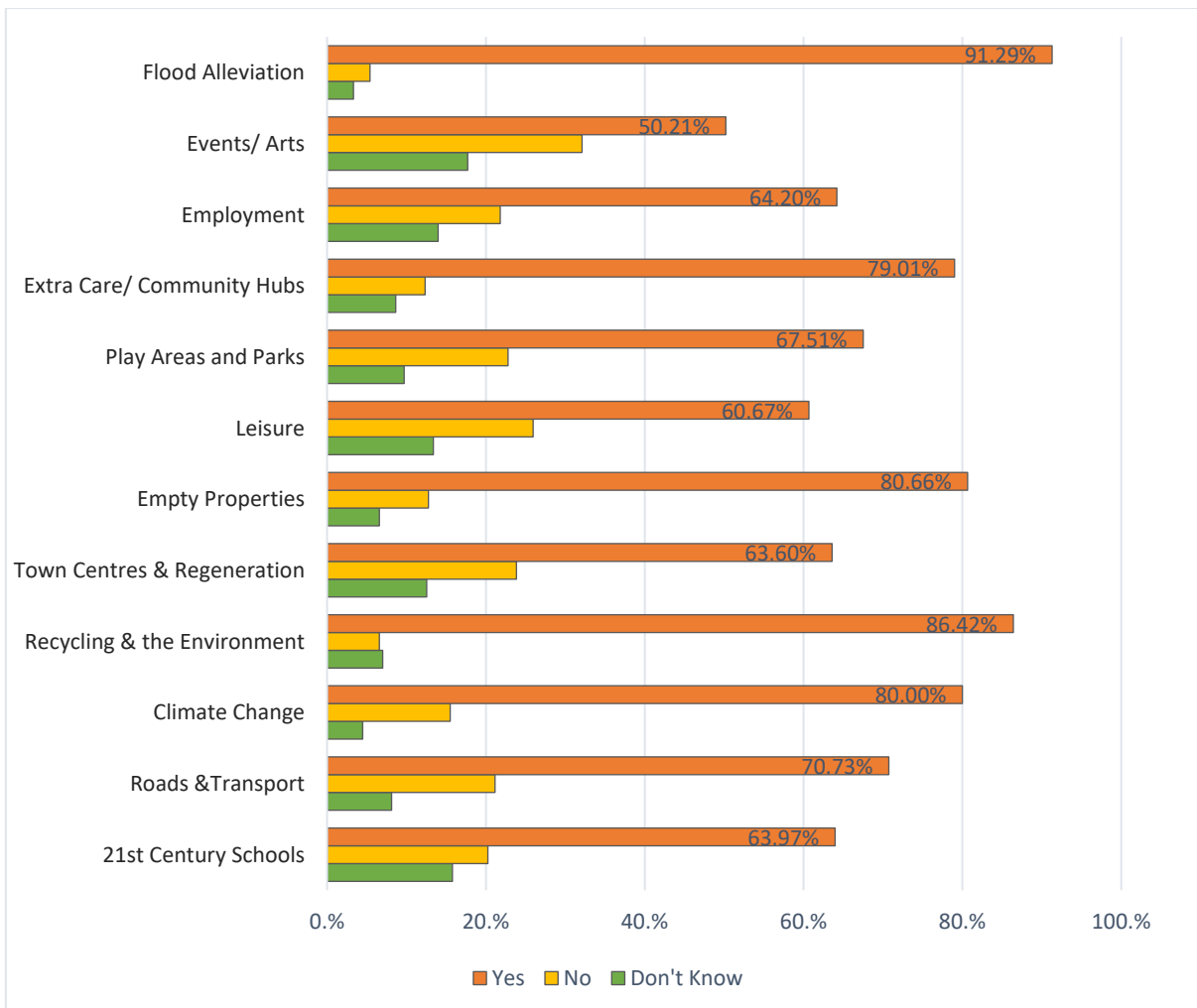


Figure 11 – Areas of Investment

	Yes	No	Don't Know
21st Century Schools	63.97%	20.24%	15.79%
Roads & Transport	70.73%	21.14%	8.13%
Climate Change	80.00%	15.51%	4.49%
Recycling & the Environment	86.42%	6.58%	7.00%
Town Centres & Regeneration	63.60%	23.85%	12.55%
Empty Properties	80.66%	12.76%	6.58%
Leisure	60.67%	25.94%	13.39%
Play Areas and Parks	67.51%	22.78%	9.70%
Extra Care/ Community Hubs	79.01%	12.35%	8.64%
Employment	64.20%	21.81%	13.99%
Events/ Arts	50.21%	32.10%	17.70%
Flood Alleviation	91.29%	5.39%	3.32%

Table 3: Areas of Investment

4.27 A large proportion of comments received about Council investment priorities related to Flood Alleviation, which supports the figures above. Respondents showed concerns about the effectiveness of measures taken already and the rate of future measures against flooding being introduced. A large number of comments also related to Climate Change and the efforts that can/should be made in this area. Whilst some respondents were quite negative about environmental concerns, a majority listed energy efficiency, reducing pollution and electric vehicle charging infrastructure as main concerns.

The word cloud/map below provides an illustrated snapshot of some of the frequent themes in comments received about Council investments.



Figure 12 – Investment comments

4.28 The following are a selection of comments received on the Council's investment areas:

21st Century Schools

“ensure maintenance budgets are used for maintenance and not other purposes”

“In relation to schools I believe they need to be funded, but it should be focussed on teaching, equipment, one to one support, pupil emotional well-being. Once these areas are better funded then consider remodelling the buildings. If however a building is not fit for use then yes I do believe money should be spent on it.”

“Schools need to be updated to embrace and reflect the technology that will benefit pupils in the long-term. By investing in providing state of the art schools, the council is also investing in the education and long term prospects of the future generations.”

“not sure about new schools, it's the teaching that is important more than the large showy school”

Roads & Transport

"I strongly disagree with investment in new /widening roads -this just encourages more people to drive and goes against what is needed.to make RCT a more attractive area to visit - yes we have some congestion in some areas at peak times but it is hardly chronic. More roads means more pollution, more habitat destruction, more bypassing of towns dependent on passing trade and more long term maintenance costs."

"Create dedicated "lay-by's" with rapid EV chargers along the main road infrastructure, to assist EV drivers who cannot charge at home. Being able to pull off road on way home from work to "top up " for 10 minutes would make a huge difference"

"Monies should be found to fund schemes such as the Rhondda Fach Relief Road extension to Maerdy and the Heads of the Valley road to stop outward migration of our young people and to attract industry to the valley to regenerate large tracts of land in the County Borough."

"No to new roads but maintain existing roads better!"

Recycling & the Environment

"I'm not sure if the above would include priority for investing in active travel and/or public transport but i think this has to be a key area of investment to create a cleaner, greener county which is accessible to everyone - not just those who own a vehicle"

"We need to stop spending on environmental issues, we are ,world wide, not even in the baby league. I.E., %1.1 of the world. Spend the money on Education for our children."

"The Council should prioritise investment in actions to combat climate change"

Town Centres & Regeneration

"The regeneration of (Aberdare) appears to be growing where other areas such as Aberdare Town is decreasing. It needs levelling up and it embarrassing to see Aberdare full of charity shops and food outlets. How is this bring residents to Aberdare. You need to put money in to get money out like you are doing in Pontypridd"

"town centre investment is really important.... over the past year with covid residents have had to look more locally for support in the towns and villages for shopping support its been the smaller grocers that have taken out deliveries allowed shopping over the phone etc...."

"Try to introduce better shopping facilities in smaller villages e.g Porth, where diversity of shops on offer has died."

Empty Properties

“Re empty properties - is this beneficial to residents, those taking their first step on the mortgage ladder or are builders benefiting from this?”

“Is the Empty Homes strategy working? How man(y) new homes has it provided for individuals to live in?”

“How can the council spend more on graduates than housing?”

Leisure

“In respect of leisure, play areas and parks, I think developments here are important but given we are still just grateful to be out of lock down and able use what we have, I think that we can postpone developments in these areas to free up funds for other priorities.”

“There are already some lovely parks in RCT for children to visit and I think spending more money on this area is an absolute waste. If we had sunshine for most of the year, I might feel differently. There are tonnes of places for children to visit already and children can play at home too.”

Extra Care/Community Hubs

“More engagement for the elderly to tackle loneliness and isolation. More support needed for unpaid carers and respite network. We need more support needed also for families with disabled children and adults to support them in their day-to-day battles to keep afloat with the workload and financial difficulties they face.”

“Investment in children and young peoples services as they have suffered most during this pandemic and I believe we could be sitting on a ticking time bomb, with young people suffering from major mental health issues as a result.”

“I fully support investment towards the vulnerable but the Council needs to take care that it is the truly vulnerable that benefit. Too many are not as vulnerable as claimed.”

“Extra Care and Community Hubs should be created – the ones currently in use are fantastic, very valuable and encouraging more and more community activities.” (OPAG Member)

Employment

“Appreciate benefit of apprenticeships but there is a limit to how many a Council should provide.”

"I think there are a surplus of apprentices and Graduates. There is already a very experienced workforce who could be utilised more efficiently."

"Investment in their current staff (as opposed to focussing solely on new staff) - allowing them to develop and assist in driving forward these priorities."

"I think the council should employ more Apprentices (to) retain skills"

Events/Arts

"While events/arts are worthwhile, it is evidenced that without the prime audiences or users, they are no longer as popular. If they are to be invested in, they need to be made more attractive to a wider community and be more diverse in what they offer; however, this may not be enough to make them viable so the money may be better invested elsewhere."

Flood Alleviation

"Flooding is huge, many still aren't back in their homes. We need to devise a strategy to help victims, prevent future natural disaster events and be better for our climate altogether."

"perhaps if drainage was addressed, the flood wouldn't have been so catastrophic, so regular drain clearing, in particular the hardest hit areas."

Council Vision and Purpose

4.29 Respondents were asked whether they agree with the Council's vision and purpose, presented as:

The Council's vision is: *"To be the best place in Wales to live, work and play, where people and businesses are independent, healthy, and prosperous".*

The Council's purpose is: *"To provide strong community leadership and create the environment for people and businesses to be independent, healthy and prosperous".*

A very strong majority of respondents, 85%, agreed with this statement.

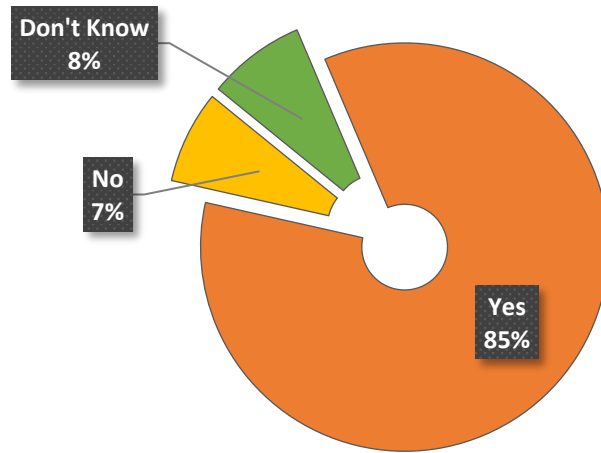


Figure 13 – Council's Vision and Purpose

Council Priorities

4.30 Respondents were asked if they agreed with the three priorities of the Council, set out as:

- *Ensuring People: are independent, healthy and successful;*
- *Creating Places: where people are proud to live, work and play; and*
- *Enabling Prosperity: creating the opportunity for people and businesses to: be innovative; be entrepreneurial; and fulfil their potential and prosper.*

4.31 Similar to the previous question, a very strong majority of respondents (87%) agreed with these statements.

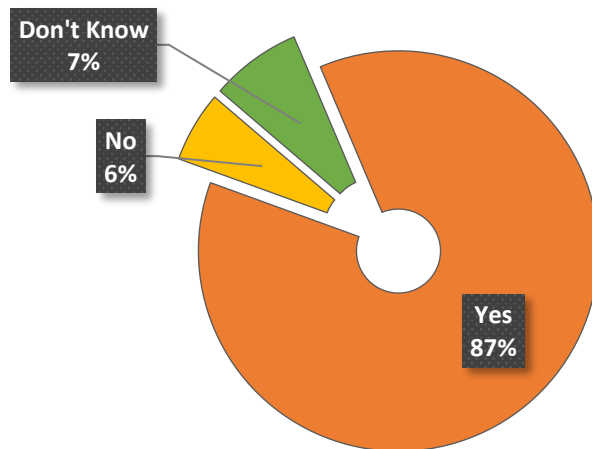


Figure 14 – Council Priorities

Cross-cutting Principle

- 4.32 Finally, respondents were asked whether they believe the Council fulfils its commitment to *‘Living Within Our Means’ – to ensure the Council uses resources economically, efficiently and effectively.*
- 4.33 Responses to this question were very mixed. Very close proportions (40% and 38% respectively) of respondents said Yes and No, whilst a sizeable proportion of 22% answered “Don’t Know”. This indicates a need for future explanations and demonstrations of how the Council is working towards this principle to be clearer.

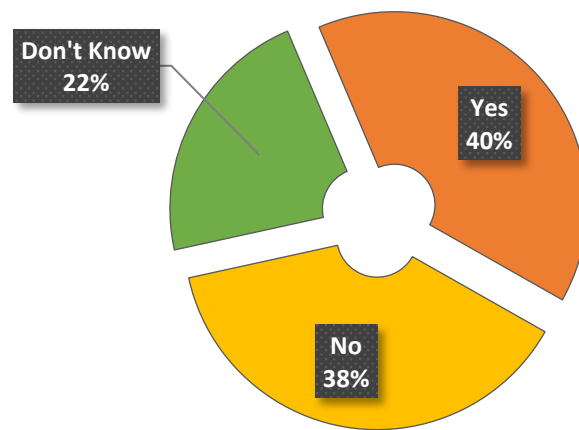


Figure 15 – Is the Council ‘Living Within Our Means’?

Poll Results

- 4.34 Four questions were available to respondents in the “Quick Poll” tool. In total there were 472 responses to these questions, although the majority of responses for the first question only, as the other questions were added to the site later in the consultation process.
- 4.35 These same questions were also asked of members of the public who visited our in-person events (described in Methodology section 3.5), so the results from those events are included in this section for clarity.

Quick Poll 1: Council Tax Increase

- 4.36 Respondents were asked *“In 2021/22 Council Tax in RCT increased by 2.65%. Do you think the Council should increase Council Tax by the same amount or less?”.*
- 4.37 Of the 267 responses received, a majority of 64.8% (173) answered “Increase by 2.65%”.

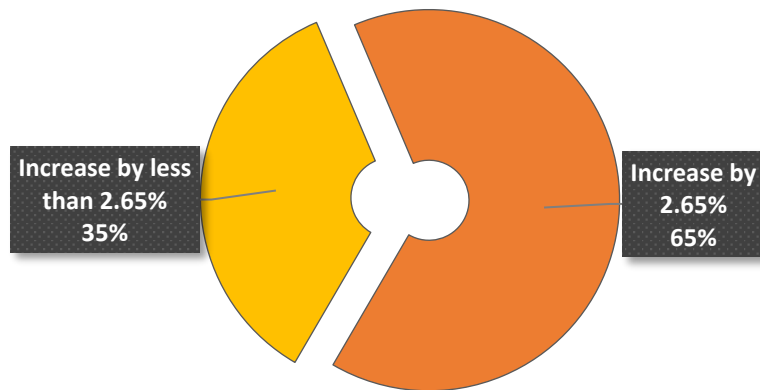


Figure 16 – Quick Poll 1: Council Tax Increase

Quick Poll 2: Schools Budget

- 4.38 Respondents were asked “*Schools Budget - Do you think the Council should provide sufficient resources to fully cover increased pay and non-pay cost pressures in our schools?*”.
- 4.39 Of 80 responses, a very strong majority of 78.8% (63) answered “Yes”.

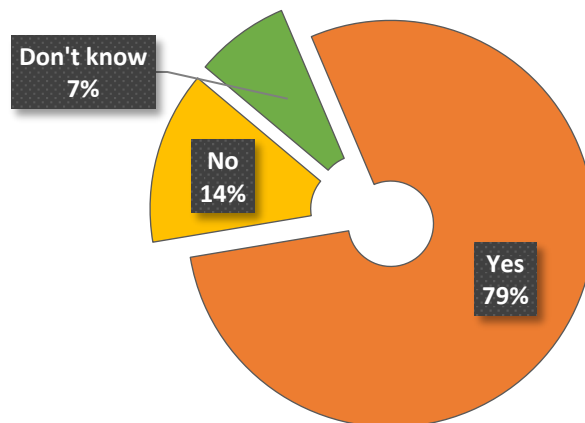


Figure 17 – Quick Poll 2: Schools Budget

Quick Poll 3: Social Care Budget

- 4.40 Respondents were asked “*Social Care Budget - Do you think the Council should continue to prioritise social services as a key area for additional investment?*”.

4.41 Of 79 responses, almost all (96.2%, or 76) answered “Yes”.

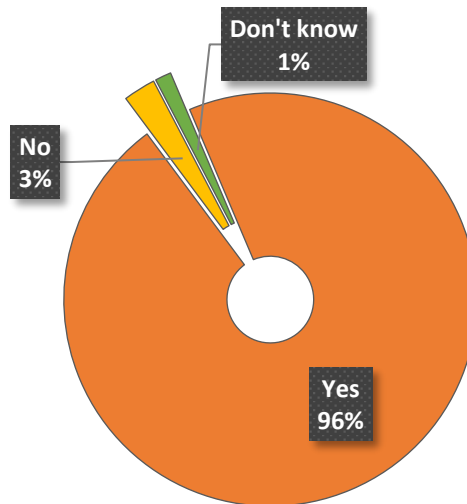


Figure 18 – Quick Poll 3: Social Care Budget

Quick Poll 4: Fees and Charges

4.42 Respondents were asked; “The CPI rate of inflation at September 2021 was 3.1%. Do you think the Council should: Increase fees and charges by the rate of inflation, increase fees and charges by less than the rate of inflation, or freeze specific fees and charges?”.

4.43 Of 46 responses to this question, almost half (47.8%, or 22 respondents) answered that certain fees and charges should be frozen. 37% (17) of respondents agreed that fees and charges should be increased by the rate of inflation, and only 15.7% (7 respondents) stated that the rate of increase should be lower than the rate of inflation.



Figure 19 – Quick Poll 4: Fees and Charges

“Ideas” Tool Results

- 4.44 10 contributions were made to the Ideas tool on the Let’s Talk Budget website, with the prompt *“Do you have any ideas how the Council can be more efficient (saving money without reducing services), or any examples of where we aren’t being efficient?”*. The responses varied in length and topic, with few common themes.

The screenshot displays six individual idea submissions arranged in two columns and three rows. Each submission is contained within a white rectangular box with a thin border. At the top left of each box is a circular profile picture (a lightbulb icon) and the user's name and submission time. The main text of the idea is centered, with a title in bold and a description below it. At the bottom of each box are three interaction options: 'Share', 'Comment', and a heart icon for 'Like', each followed by a numerical value.

User	Time	Title	Description	Share	Comment	Like
Anon	a month ago	Volunteering, training and nature	Have a centre in the town for volunteering. People can help out a...	0	0	0
Patrick Byrne	2 months ago	Use 25% of public authority pension contributions (only) & invest it in local infrastructure (Council homes) to cut homelessness & imp stock	If RCT pen cons are £52m p/a that wld equate to £13m or 153 new h...	0	0	0
Anon	a month ago	More dog friendly areas in Treorchy to save people travelling to ponty to exercise their dogs. More facilities for basketball for young pe		0	0	0
Irene Hughes, Treorci	17 days ago	Spend more in the right areas, such as social care, housing and education	Spend to improve	0	0	0
Morgan	a month ago	Shared education service with Merthyr Tydfil	This would save costs - shared music service, shared Governor sup...	0	1	1
Anon	a month ago	More people looking at the co...ns of the lanes for rubbish and fly tipping.		0	0	0

Figure 20 – Screenshot of Ideas received on the Let’s Talk Budget website

5. VIRTUAL YOUNG PERSONS ENGAGEMENT

- 5.1 In previous years the Consultation Team have held face to face sessions with secondary schools and young people across the Borough. Due to the restrictions as a result of the pandemic again this year, virtual sessions were arranged in place of the on-site / face-to-face visits.
- 5.2 We engaged with 3 secondary school groups and held 3 virtual sessions via TEAMS. We spoke to pupils from St. John Baptist Church in Wales High School, Y Pant Comprehensive School and Treorchy Comprehensive School.
- 5.3 The sessions were attended by members of the Consultation Team along with a finance officer. During the sessions the young people were shown a video outlining the budget challenges followed by a short presentation with discussion prompts and questions from the full budget consultation.
- 5.4 The questions were centred around Council Tax levels, Fees and Charges, Council Service Priorities, Efficiencies and the School budget. In total we engaged with 45 young people and a summary of their responses will follow in this section. The sessions were well supported by the teachers and all young people engaged well with the format.

Council Tax

- 5.5 We asked the groups 'Should Council Tax be increased by 2.65% (the same level as the 2021/2022 increase) to keep services at current levels or should there be a smaller increase risking losing some services?'

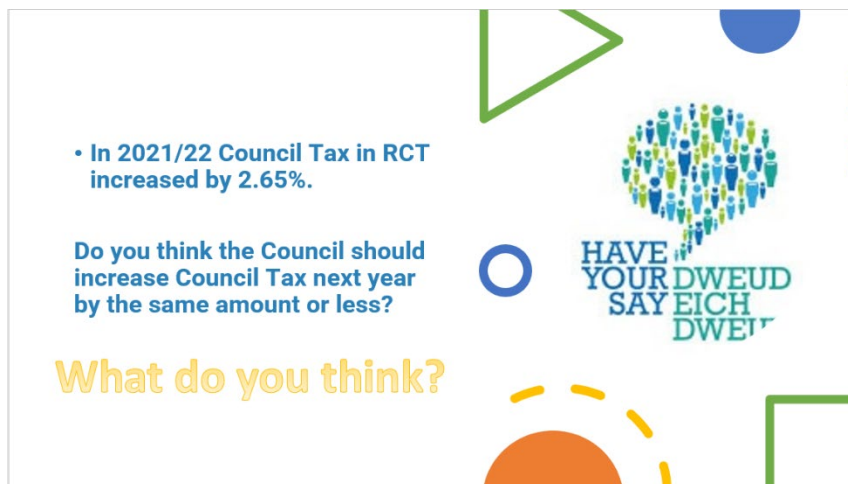


Figure 21 – Council Tax presentation slide

- 5.6 Of the 45 young people we spoke to, there was general agreement with increasing Council Tax by 2.65% again, although they were only in favour of this after seeking confirmation that core services would not be affected. Some young people fed back that Council Tax should have a lower increase or even remain at the current level and was based on the view

that the Covid-19 pandemic has had an impact on employment locally and therefore people may struggle to afford an increase.

Comments included:

“Will the increase in Council Tax improve services or just maintain current services?”

“Would a lower increase cause reduction in services?”

“Increase by the same.”

“It does add up after a while.”

“Covid impact and loss of jobs.”

“Less than 2.65% increase.”

“Fair increase (2.65%) due to it being the least in Wales.”

Fees and Charges

5.7 We asked the young people whether they felt there should be changes to a range of Council fees and charges, providing the options for fees and charges to be increased or decreased / frozen.

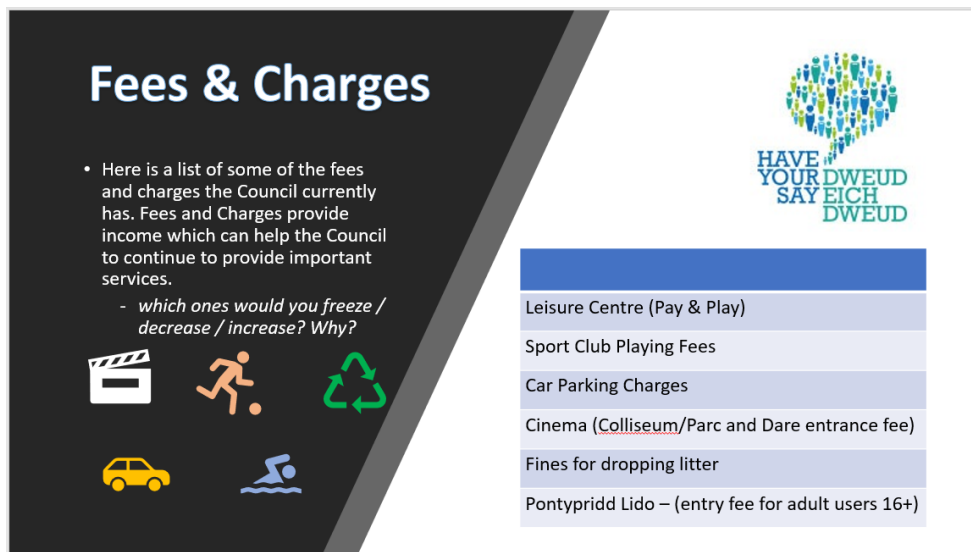


Figure 22 – Fees & Charges presentation slide

Comments included:

Increase

“Increase litter fines as we are going through an environmental crisis.”

“Increase fines on litter because people don’t seem to care and there needs to be a consequence.”

Decrease

“Cinema could decrease as by the time you buy food etc it can be expensive.”

“Pontypridd Lido could be decreased so more people can use it.”

“Decrease the fees for leisure centres because after lockdown people need to be able to access them for health and wellbeing.”

“Decrease car parking fees to encourage people into town centres.”

Freeze

“Sports club charges should be frozen. Health is important and needed to help protect the NHS with long term health implications.”

- 5.8 There seemed to be a general agreement with increasing charges for litter fines with the hope of deterring people from dropping litter and/or learning their lesson. Various comments also highlighted the need to freeze or decrease sports and leisure facilities so people could access these for their wellbeing. Car parking charges and entrance fees for cinema and Lido were also deemed important to decrease to encourage more usage.

Other comments / questions:

“With fines that are charged, does 100% come to the Council, and how much did parking and litter fines generate for the Council in recent years?”

“We believe Ponty Lido should have a charge for adults, but this needs to be raised to ages 18+ as many students come families with living wages that haven't increased and the children under 18 don't necessarily have in income to pay for these activities.”

“The car parking charges could damage the local community with local businesses seeing a drop in footfall. Although we do recognise there needs to be a charge.”

“We agree that there needs to be a charge for the Park & Dare.”

“Would workers in the area be given a discount for their parking fees for travelling to work?”

Council Service Priorities

- 5.9 We asked all groups to identify which Council services were important to them. We provided a list of service areas and discussions were held around which ones the groups felt should be a priority and the levels of funding provided.

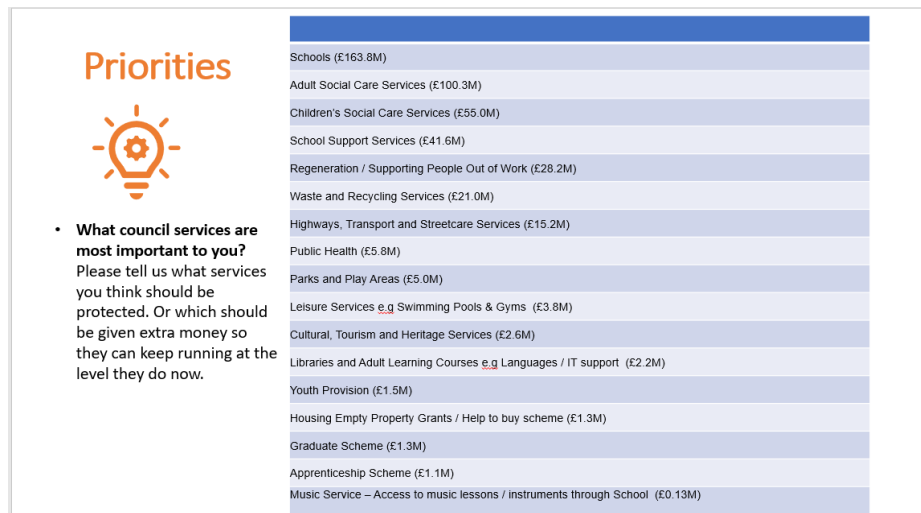


Figure 23 – Priorities presentation slide

- 5.10 The Music Services emerged as a strong priority amongst one group with members of the group discussing their own personal experience of using the Music service, they were all in agreement that the service would benefit from more funding, however another group disagreed and didn't see the service as a priority.

Music Service – Access to music lessons / instruments through school

“Music services should have an increase in their budget – learning music helps with increased confidence and helps in school.”

“The music service is very important in our school and we recognise that we get better provision than schools in Cardiff and Caerphilly etc. We believe this needs more funding.”

“Perhaps decrease music services because it's niche.”

- 5.11 The Library Service was another service which saw a divide in opinion with regards to priorities.

Libraries and Adult Learning Courses e.g. Languages / IT support

“Libraries should be protected, definitely adult learning. Libraries provide support and services to people. Adults can carry out applications for jobs etc.”

“Decrease spending on libraries because you can get everything they offer online.”

- 5.12 Youth Provision was seen as a very important service to young people especially when it came to wellbeing. Questions were raised around the youth services budget and whether it would be better placed sitting in another service area such as leisure or the Library Service due to the use of Youth Services being primarily used for wellbeing.

Youth Provision

“YEPS are very important. It’s good to have an officer in School to talk to about wellbeing.”

“Is there a way to reduce the budget of youth services to add to leisure services and the library services? These are the alternative provision young people are turning to for wellbeing etc.”

- 5.13 Apprenticeship schemes were identified as a consistent trend amongst the groups as an area of high importance and where funding is most needed. The groups all felt these schemes played an important part for young people who would look at alternatives to university. It was also seen as a positive option for the Council.

Apprenticeships

“We feel apprenticeships need more money as many students look for alternatives to university.”

“Increase spending on apprenticeships because the more people in work the greater the income for the Council will be.”

- 5.14 Public Health was also identified by some of the young people as being a priority service area. Given the impacts of the global pandemic in 2020 young people felt that this required adequate funding to be able to manage the ongoing impacts of Covid-19. Feedback included:

Public Health

“Public health budgets wouldn’t have to increase if there were strong guidelines that were enforced by Welsh government (especially in relation to Covid-19)”

“Increase Public Health because it benefits everybody.”

- 5.15 Schools and Education were also a priority. The importance of being able to access a good education, along with extra-curricular provision with sufficient IT resources was the main reason for this being a priority for young people.

Schools

“Schools definitely need an increase in budget – the pupils feel that extra-curricular provision for schools would benefit and this could help replace youth services. School ICT needs to improve as well.”

- 5.16 Another priority identified across the groups was funding for housing grants / schemes. The ability to be able to access suitable housing options was seen as important by the groups and one that they felt could benefit from increased funding. Feedback included:

Housing Empty Property Grants / Help to buy scheme

“Why is housing a low priority in terms of budget – the pupils are led to believe there is a housing crisis in the locality. This is linked to the flood damages caused to properties in Pentre, where there was a clear shortage of housing to support families that were impacted.”

- 5.17 The remaining service areas also received individual comments throughout the sessions which have been noted below:

Adult Social Care / Children’s Social Care

“Protect social care because it’s important to protect the vulnerable.”

Regeneration / supporting people out of work

“Increase spending on job centres to help people into work.”

Waste

“I use the train a lot as my mum doesn’t drive. There’s lots of rubbish at the station. Waste services are needed.”

Highways, Transport and Streetcare Services

“Spending more on transport could encourage more (lorry) drivers, who are striking and in short supply for businesses that need them.”

Climate Change

“Is the environment factored into this as well?”

Efficiencies

- 5.18 We discussed the requirement for the Council to aim to be as efficient as possible and asked for the groups’ views on this approach and if they had any ideas of ways in which the Council could become more efficient. The groups all felt that looking for ways to become more efficient was a useful task and lots of ideas and comments were generated.

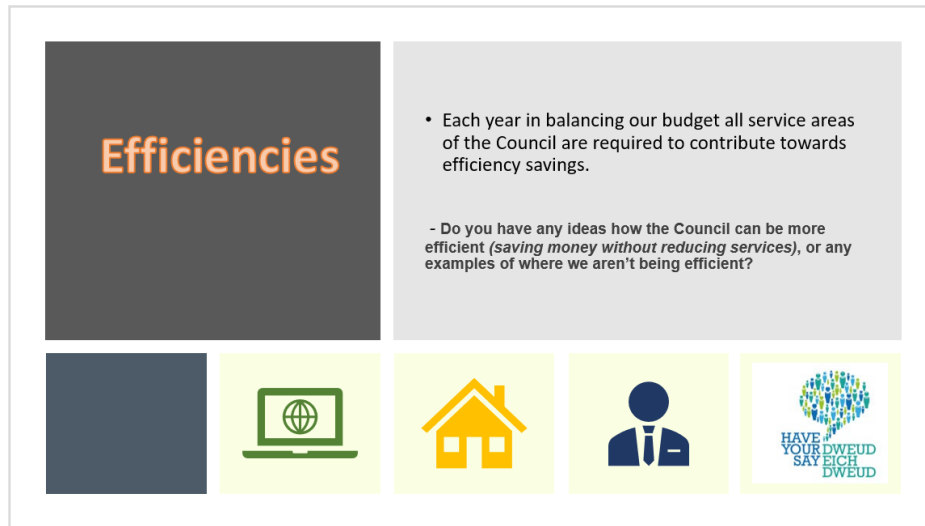


Figure 24 – Efficiencies presentation slide

5.19 Feedback included:

"Increase checking on claimants to make sure they are entitled."

"Reduce spending on highway improvements."

"The sensors on lights (suggested by the Finance Officer as an example) don't work – no point them only coming on when you are already there."

"Improving school buildings would help save energy wastage."

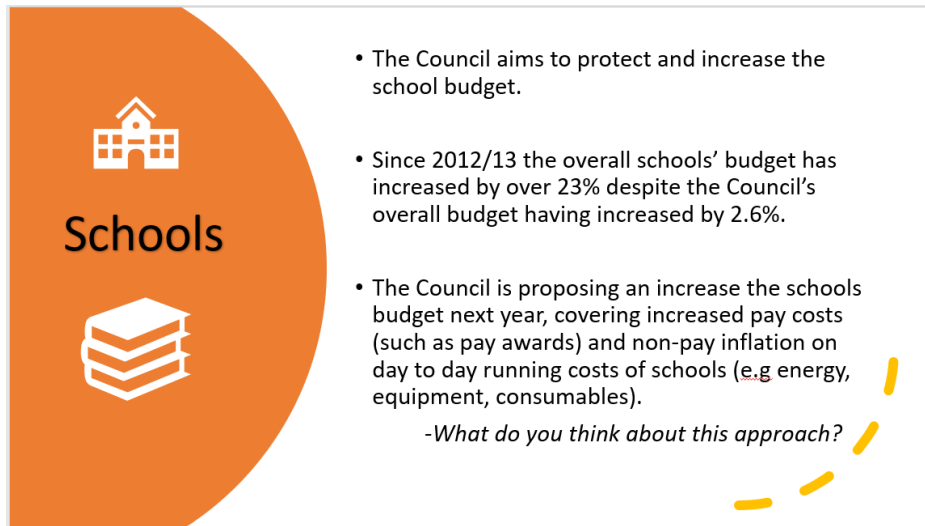
"We believe an area needs to be maintained (grass verges being cut, tidiness and so on) to entice people to the locality."

"More (Council staff) working from home and therefore close buildings that aren't being used. Restructure employment working areas, have more communal hubs working areas for smaller companies."

"Roundabout's maintenance – could be left to go wild."

Schools Budget

5.20 When asked whether the groups agreed with the Council's approach to protect and prioritise the Schools budget, all young people agreed with this. There was agreement that education is an important service area for young people and is something that should continue to receive adequate funding. The groups acknowledged that the increased budget could be used to provide better buildings and school equipment, specifically better IT, and Internet to give learners the best experience possible.



The slide features an orange circular graphic on the left containing a schoolhouse icon, the word "Schools", and a stack of books icon. To the right, there is a list of bullet points and a question.

- The Council aims to protect and increase the school budget.
- Since 2012/13 the overall schools' budget has increased by over 23% despite the Council's overall budget having increased by 2.6%.
- The Council is proposing an increase the schools budget next year, covering increased pay costs (such as pay awards) and non-pay inflation on day to day running costs of schools (e.g energy, equipment, consumables).

-What do you think about this approach?

Figure 25 – Schools Budget presentation slide

5.21 Feedback included:

“All in agreement of increases to be proactive as education is key to the regeneration of the Upper Rhondda.”

“The approach is fair, but there should be more spending on IT provision and the number of subjects on offer in schools.”

“There’s a waiting list for mental health support in schools. Demand has increased since Covid.”

“The computers in the 6th form areas are very old and slow. There could be more money invested in tech in the schools.”

Questions:

“Would the school model used in Tonypanyd with a 3-16 school save the Council money by closing down local primary schools and moving them to Treorchy Comprehensive?” Pupils are approximately 40% for and 60% against this type of scheme.

“What are pay awards in schools?” A “Higher rates of pay for staff.”

“Internet isn’t fast enough. We have a lot of problems with school Internet. Is that part of the school budget?”

A “It is part of the School budget - RCT’s ICT group have a Service Level Agreement (SLA) with RCT schools, this means the Schools pay RCT ICT for an agreed level of service annually. This agreement covers the fibre/broadband as well as anti-virus and other security software provisions. ICT in turn have a contract with BT to provide the fibre/broadband to schools, for which there is a minimum speed expected. Funding was also provided from Welsh Government’s Hwb digital learning initiative to raise internet speeds in schools nationwide. If the speed is less than promised by BT then ICT would ask BT to resolve this, however it

could be a technical or physical issue within the fabric of the schools causing a loss of speed. ICT recommend raising a call with their helpdesk who will investigate and resolve any problem they identify or take it up with BT if the speed at the entry point is lower than promised.”

Other comments and questions relating to the Budget, Consultation process, Volunteering, and the Welsh Language:

- 5.22 Questions were raised about the replacement of trees cut down in the Heads of the Valleys redevelopment work. Our Finance Officer responded this is a Welsh Government project, not RCT.

“Younger pupils need more opportunities for this kind of activity (i.e., this consultation) where they feel listened to and valued.”

“What about generating more income like tolls on the A470?” A – “that would be Welsh Government’s area. Councils throughout the UK have explored income-generating projects outside their core areas of expertise, with varying degrees of success”.

“Where is money being spent in relation to the Welsh language? This is an important issue in our school.” A – “recent consultations have taken place regarding the Welsh Language, results and reports will be available soon on the Council’s website.”

“More bilingual signage, more bilingual books available in schools and libraries.”

“Volunteering works inside an educational course where there is a qualification. We feel that asking pupils to volunteer after school is unrealistic as many pupils have part time jobs. Within the school we offer volunteering such as reading sessions etc.”

Instagram and Facebook

- 5.23 Budget content was created and shared on the YEPS Instagram account. 2 posts went out on November 5 and November 16 advertising the Budget Consultation and detailing how young people could take part. There was a link to the Consultation’s Let’s Talk website which had a dedicated Budget project page consisting of web polls, an ‘Idea’ tool and the Council’s main survey. Young people were also informed that web polls would appear on Instagram Stories.



Figure 26 – YEPS RCT Instagram post

5.24 Instagram stories received high numbers of views:

Q1: 311 views
Q2: 359 views
Q3: 325 views
Q4: 236 views

Table 4: Instagram Story Views

5.25 The stories each had a poll.

Story 1:
Spending money on schools

We have always aimed to spend as much as we can on our schools. Even though we have less money overall, the money we spend on schools has gone up.

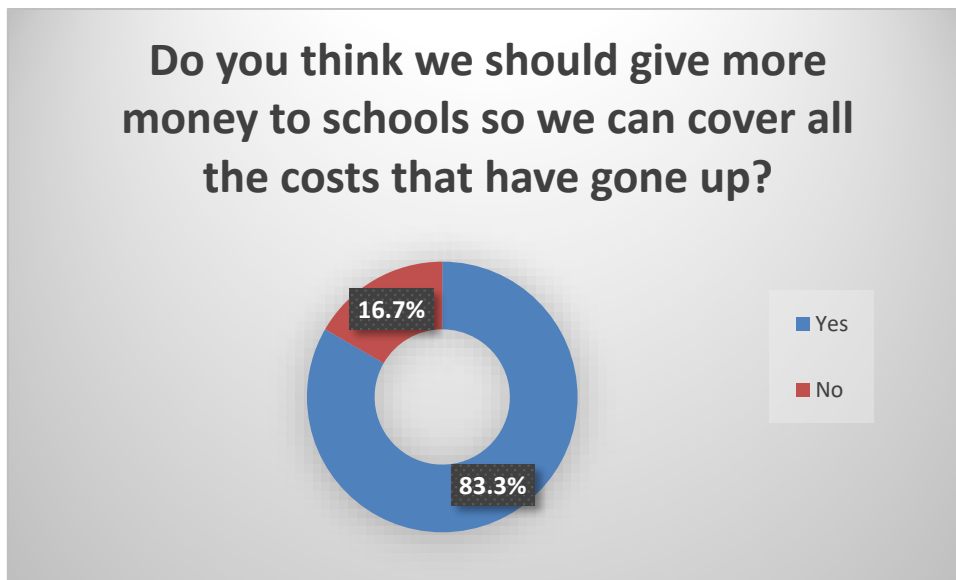


Figure 27 – School Budget Instagram Story Poll

5.26 Based on 30 votes, a high majority agreed that the Council should give more money to schools to cover costs.

Story 2:

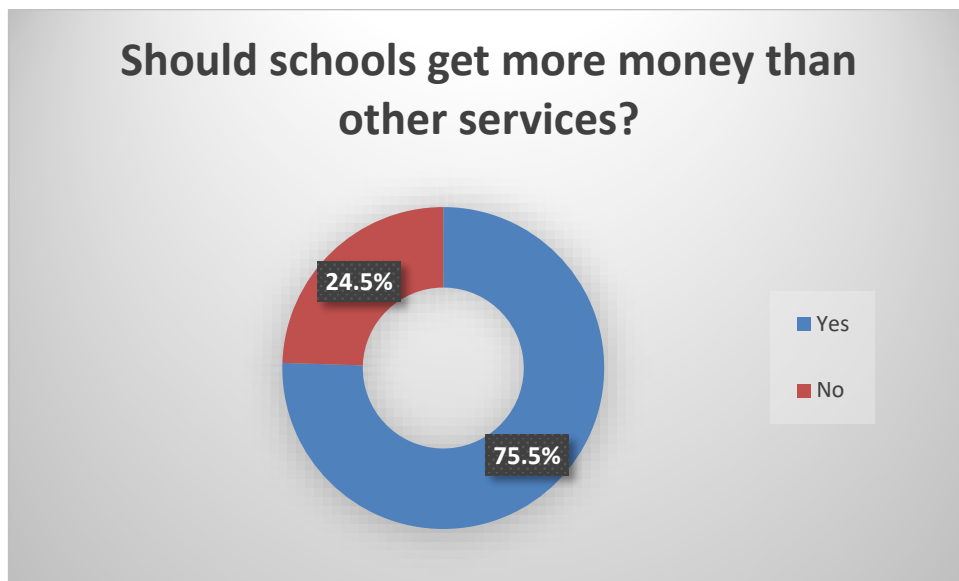


Figure 28 – “Should schools get more money than other services?”

5.27 Based on 49 votes, the majority agreed that schools should get more money than other services.

**Story 3:
Social Care**

5.28 We know that social services are really important in supporting the most vulnerable people, families and children in our communities. We prioritise more money to this service by employing more workers, supporting residential, home care, and fostering services to cope with increasing demand while investing in the social care workforce.

5.29 Over the past three years, the budget for these areas has increased by £15M (around 11%).

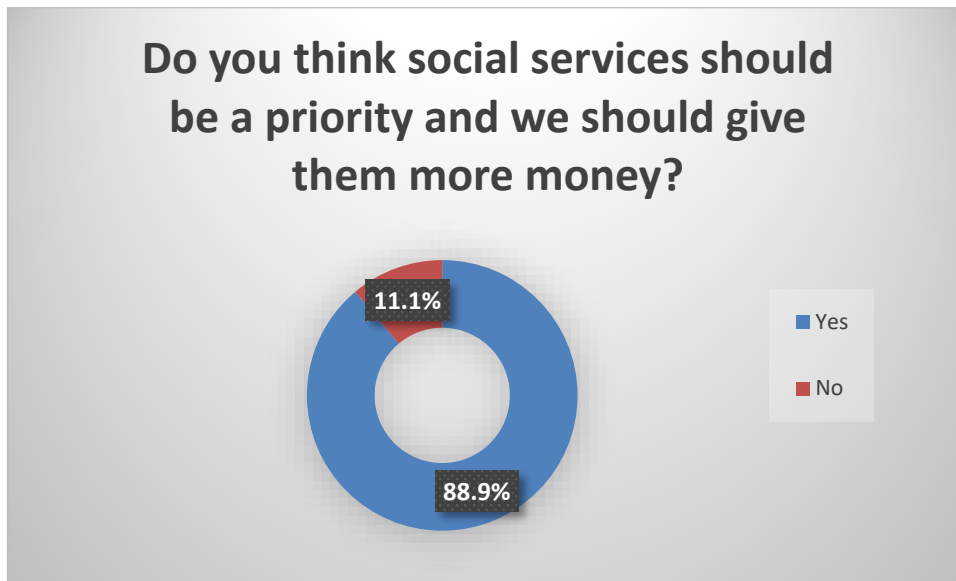


Figure 29 – Social Services Instagram Story Poll

5.30 Based on 18 votes, a high majority agreed that Social Services should be a priority.

**Story 4:
Council Tax**

5.31 Council Tax is money you have to give to your local authority to pay for things like schools, roads, social services and parks. We had the lowest increase in Council Tax in Wales last year. We think if we increase Council Tax by 2.65% next year we can keep services running as they currently are.

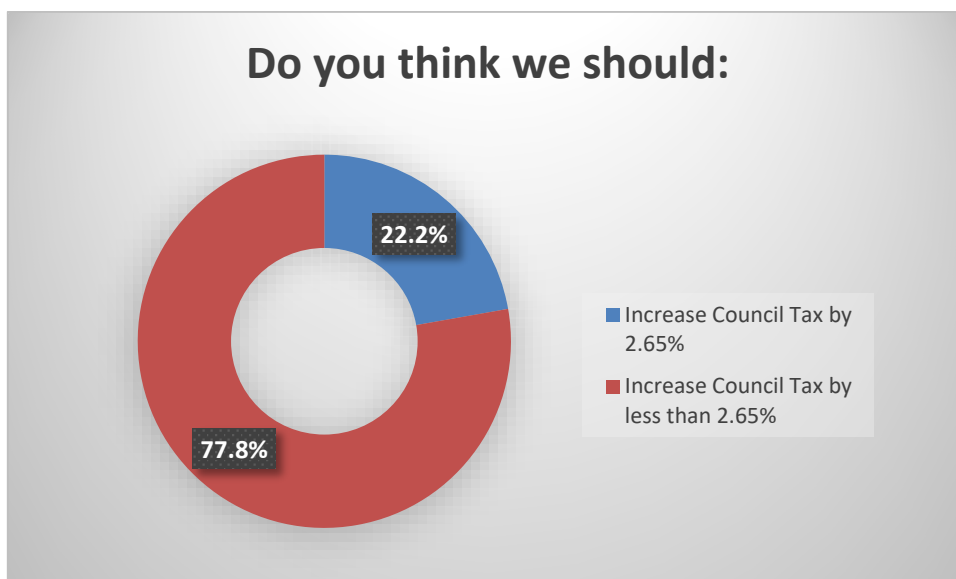


Figure 30 – Council Tax Story Poll

- 5.32 Based on 9 votes, the majority felt that Council tax should be increased by less than 2.65%.
- 5.33 The Council's Budget Content was also shared by YEPS' Facebook account and received 7 likes and 8 shares.
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