



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET

17TH OCTOBER 2022

ENGAGEMENT ON THE COUNCIL'S BUDGET 2023/24

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES AND COMMUNICATIONS – CHRISTIAN HANAGAN IN DISCUSSION WITH THE DEPUTY LEADER OF THE COUNCIL, COUNCILLOR MAUREEN WEBBER

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1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to inform Cabinet of the proposed approach to resident engagement and consultation in respect of the 2023/24 budget setting process.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Cabinet:

- 2.1 Support the further development and continuation of the approach to the Council's budget consultation introduced in last years consultation for 2023/24, using the Councils Let's Talk Engagement website, as well as community face-to-face engagement. 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 and that these will be met via the proposed approach.
- 2.3 Support the phase 1 budget consultation process taking place during the autumn of 2022, with the dates to be confirmed following clarification of the Welsh Government budget settlement timescales.
- 2.4 Authorise 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 to provide feedback to the Cabinet on the 2023/24 budget setting process, via a range of engagement methods.

4. BACKGROUND

- 4.1 Every year the Council aims to undertake a comprehensive approach to its annual budget consultation, involving a large number of residents and key stakeholders.
- 4.2 The approach includes 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 2022/23 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 In the last couple of years the COVID-19 pandemic has presented a unique set of circumstances for engagement and consultation. Face-to-face engagement made a return last year and we will continue with this approach, with the relevant precautions in place.
- 4.5 The 2023/24 annual budget consultation will include a range of methods. We will continue to build on the digital approach, using the successful Let's Talk Engagement platform. 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 provide a number of face-to-face engagement opportunities in the community.
- 4.6 It is therefore proposed that the approach outlined in section 5 below is utilised for the 2023/24 budget consultation process

5. PROPOSED ENGAGEMENT APPROACH

- 5.1 The 2023/24 budget consultation will take place in 2 phases. The first phase will take place in the autumn of 2022 and will aim to collect views on the Councils' capital investment priorities, council tax, service levels and efficiency savings in the context of the challenging financial environment as modelled and set out in the Council's updated Medium Term Financial Plan. This will enable the Cabinet time to consider the feedback received whilst developing a draft Budget Strategy for 2023/24. 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 make use of our digital tools 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, provides a user friendly and interactive form of engagement. The "Let's Talk Budget" project will provide key information, documents, graphics and videos to outline the background and context to the Council's budget, in addition to a number of engagement tools to allow feedback, which last year included online polls, a survey, and the ideas tool.
- 5.4 The Council's Social media platforms 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. This will include youth engagement, with Budget content created and shared on the YEPS Instagram and Facebook accounts through polls and stories.
- 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, working with our Youth Engagement Team.
- A presentation and discussion with young people via our schools
- 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.
- Community hubs

5.9 As in all of the Council's consultations we will 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 available through 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 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 previous years has increased the range of engagement in the budget consultation process through a more interactive and varied approach and has been well received.

12.2 The approach outlined in this report seeks to continue our positive ongoing conversations, by ensuring that all residents and service users have every opportunity to provide feedback and inform the budget setting process.

12.3 The results of the phase 1 consultation will be presented to senior officers and Cabinet Members early in the new year to inform the development of a proposed 2023/24 Revenue Budget Strategy, before a phase 2 consultation on the draft strategy itself.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

AS AMENDED BY

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

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Other Information: -

***Relevant Scrutiny Committee: Overview & Scrutiny & Finance and
Performance***

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