

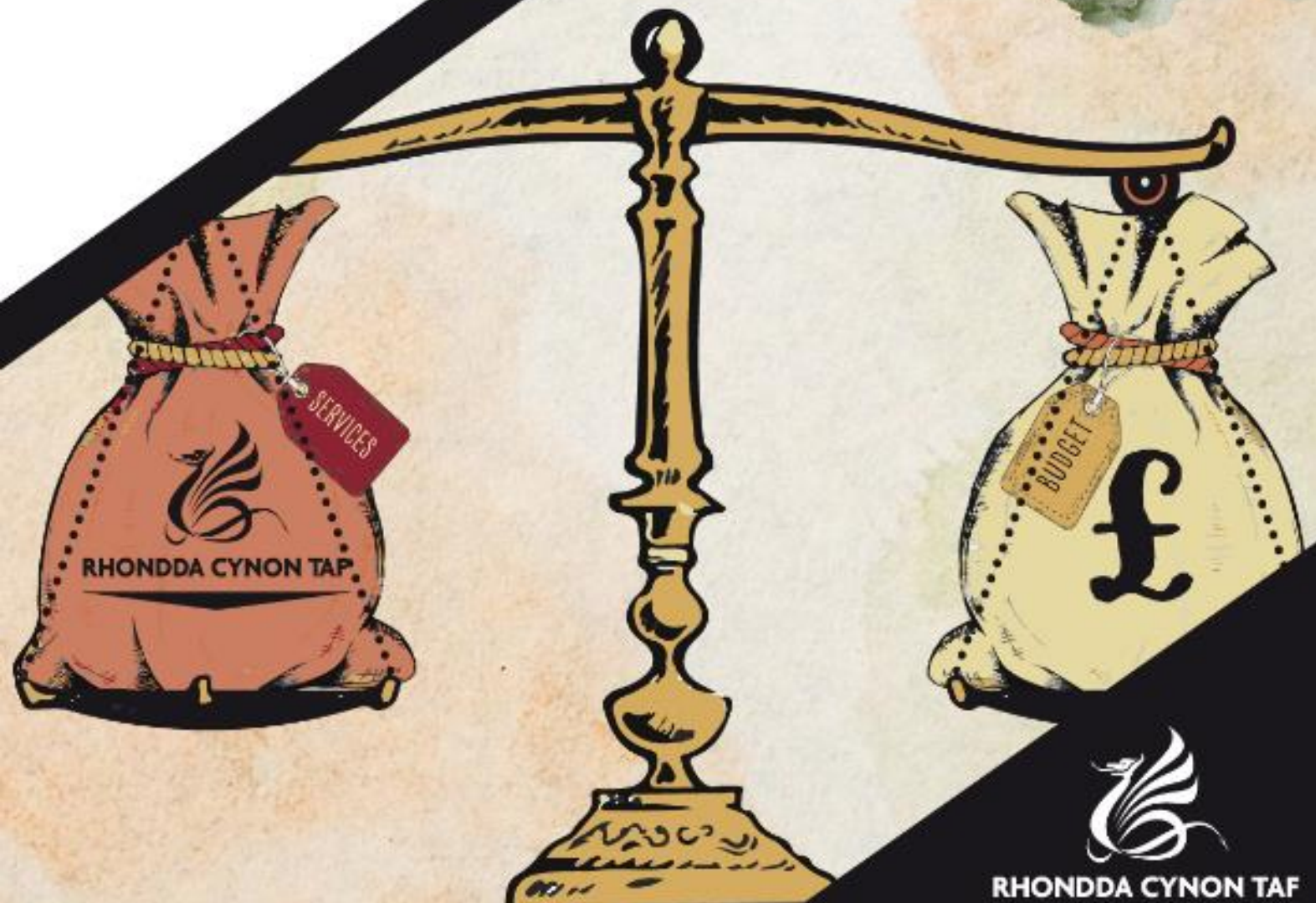


# 2023/24 BUDGET (PHASE 1)

## Budget Consultation

Rhondda Cynon Taf CBC

January 2023



RHONDDA CYNON TAF

## CONTENTS

	<b><u>Section</u></b>	<b>Page</b>
	<b>Executive Summary</b>	4
1.	<b>Introduction</b>	6
2.	<b>Background</b>	7
3.	<b>Methodology</b>	8
4.	<b>Let's Talk Budget</b> - Questionnaire - Polls - Instagram	10
5.	<b>Community Conversations</b>	29
6.	<b>Young Person Engagement</b>	32

## FIGURES AND TABLES

<b>Figures</b>	<b>Page</b>
Figure 1 - Schools Budget Increase	10
Figure 2 - Prioritisation of Social Services for additional investment	11
Figure 3 – Fees and Charges	12
Figure 4 – Comments on Fees and Charges	13
Figure 5 – Comments on Council Services	14
Figure 6 – Council Tax	17
Figure 7 – Preferred Level of Council Tax	18
Figure 8 – Efficiency Strategy Agreement	20
Figure 9 – Manager Efficiency Agreement	20
Figure 10 – Efficiency Comments	21
Figure 11 – Council Reserves Strategy	23
Figure 12 – Council Areas of Focus	24
Figure 13 – Quick Poll 1: Council Tax Increase	25
Figure 14 – Respondent Categories	26
Figure 15 – Instagram Poll 1 – Budget Gap	27
Figure 16 – Instagram Poll 2 – Schools	27
Figure 17 – Instagram Poll 3 – Social Services	28
Figure 18 – Public Engagement Board	29
Figure 19 – Service Areas	30
Figure 20 – Efficiencies	31
Figure 21 – Climate Change	31
Figure 22 - Council Fees and Charges slide	32
Figure 23 - Priorities presentation slide	33
Figure 24 - Efficiencies presentation slide	34
Figure 25 - Schools Budget presentation slide	35
Figure 26 – YEPS RCT Instagram post for the Budget Consultation	36
Figure 27 - Instagram Story Views YEPS	37
Figure 28 – School Budget Instagram Story Poll	38
Figure 29 – Social Services Instagram poll	38

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- This section provides a summary of the main findings from the Phase 1 Budget Consultation 2023/24.
- The consultation was conducted in-house and ran from the 23<sup>rd</sup> November to 21<sup>st</sup> December 2022.
- The following methods were used to consult with stakeholders: online survey and Quick Poll via the [Let's Talk Budget website](#); a series of outdoor events with budget and climate themed 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.
- 515 full survey responses were received, with a further 525 Quick Poll responses.
- 72.6% of respondents agreed that the Council should provide sufficient resources to fully cover increased pay and non-pay costs in our schools.
- 81.6% of respondents agreed that the Council should continue to prioritise social services as a key area for additional investment.
- 84.3% of respondents agreed that individual reviews of fees and charges is a reasonable approach for the Council to take. Comments included the key themes of affordability, support for individual reviews of different fees and charges and views on different chargeable service areas. In general, commenters were in favour of protecting essential services and applying increases to non-essential services.
- With respect to perceived importance of services, respondents mentioned waste and recycling collection, many of which referred to the ongoing consultation regarding potential reduction in waste collections. Social care services and education also had a great deal of support in the comments, alongside libraries, leisure services and the importance of maintaining face-to-face services alongside digital improvements and online services.
- 68.3% of respondents answered that protecting services at current levels through a reasonable increase in Council Tax was preferable. 31.7% answered that they think the Council should cut services in order to minimise Council Tax increases.
- Respondents were also asked to choose their preferred level of Council Tax increase for next year, with three options provided. 55% of respondents selected the lowest option of 0% - 3%, with 37.9% selecting the second band of between 3% and 5%. 7.2% of respondents selected the highest level of 5%+.

- When asked for any general comments about Council Tax, the majority of commenters voiced concern that any increase/ large increases in Council Tax would add pressure to vulnerable and working families in RCT during the cost-of-living crisis, although many commenters also agreed that preserving service levels is very important.
- The majority of respondents (91.7%) thought that the approach to efficiencies outlined was a good strategy.
- 89.5% of respondents said that we should continue to expect our managers to deliver more efficient services in the future.
- 75.1% of respondents agreed that the Council should continue with the Reserves Strategy that was outlined.
- A Quick Poll asked people whether they believe the Council should a) reduce service levels to close any budget gap and keep any increase in Council Tax to a minimum or b) protect as many Council services as possible at their current level by applying a reasonable increase in Council Tax to contribute to closing the budget gap. Of the 525 responses received, a majority of 76.6% (402) answered “Protect as many Council services as possible at their current level by applying a reasonable increase in Council Tax to contribute to closing the budget gap.”
- Over 1300 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 2023/24.
- 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 Sections 5 presents the results from a number of community conversations that took place across Rhondda Cynon Taf.
- 1.6 Section 6 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 2023/24 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 reserves; and
  - Council Tax Reduction Scheme
- 2.5 Phase 1 of the Council's budget consultation ran from the 23<sup>rd</sup> November to 21<sup>st</sup> December 2022.
- 2.6 Phase 2 of the consultation will commence in January 2023 and will seek to obtain views on the proposed Budget Strategy for 2023/24.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

- 3.1 The 2023/24 budget consultation has 2 phases. This report presents the results of the first phase. Phase 1 of the Council's budget consultation ran from the 23<sup>rd</sup> November to 21<sup>st</sup> December 2022 and aimed to collect views on 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 2023/24. 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 [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 and graphics to outline the background to the Council's budget, in addition to a number of engagement tools to allow feedback, which included online polls and a survey.
- 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 held across the county borough. 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:

Trailer Event 1:	Pontypridd Mill Street	30/11/2022
Trailer Event 2:	Tonypandy Town Centre	2/12/2022
Trailer Event 3:	Aberdare Town Centre	7/12/2022

- 3.6 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 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 an "Easy Read" document of the budget documents, online and available on request (in both Welsh and English).



- 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 and Community Hubs.
- 3.10 We engaged with young people in St. John Baptist Church in Wales High School. The session was attended by members of the Consultation Team along with a finance officer. During the session a presentation was shared with the young people 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 the 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 Over 1,300 people were engaged in the phase 1 budget consultation.

## 4 Let's Talk Budget

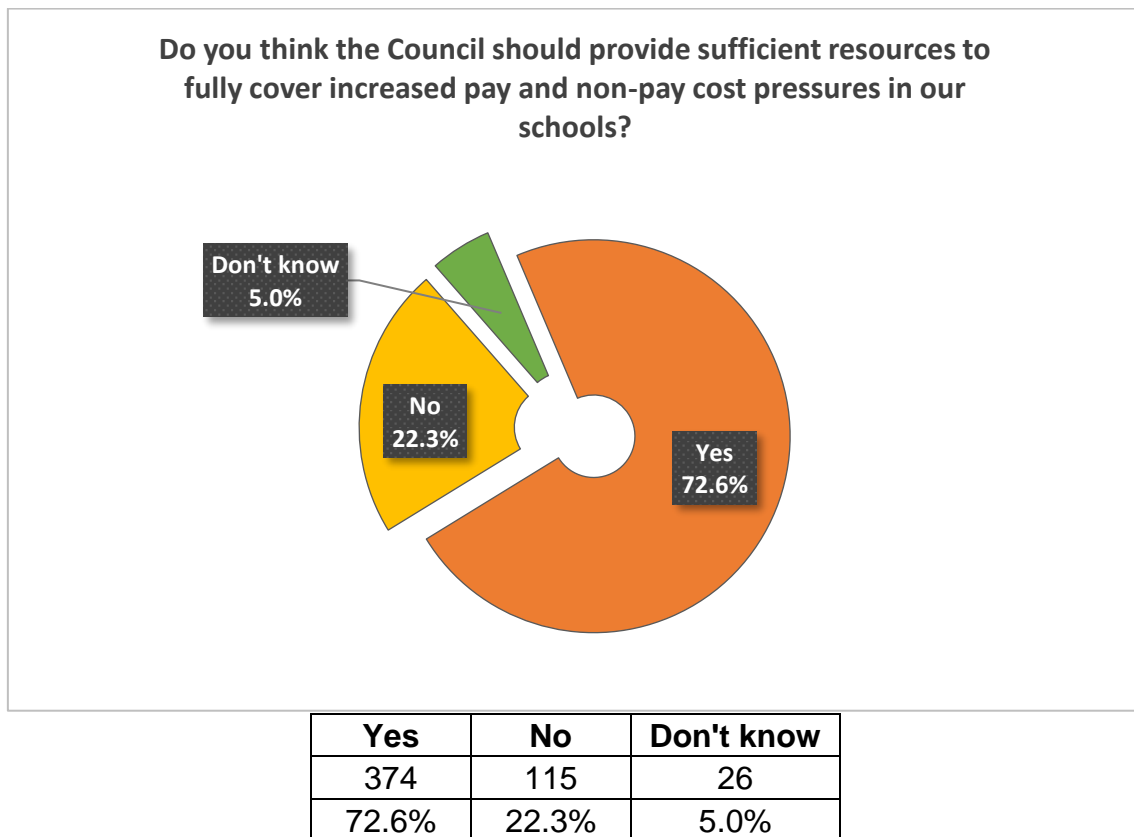
- 4.1 The following section outlines the results from the main consultation activities, including those carried out on the Let's Talk Budget website.
- 4.2 There were two ways for page visitors to engage with the consultation. Firstly, the full survey, with questions written and provided by the Finance department of RCT. Secondly, a stand-alone Quick Poll question about Council Tax increases to capture additional responses from site visitors unable or unwilling to complete the full survey.

### Survey Results

- 4.3 A total of 515 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. Where any figures do not add up to 100%, this is due to rounding and does not signify an error in counting.

#### Schools Budget

- 4.4 72.6% of respondents agreed that the Council should provide sufficient resources to fully cover increased pay and non-pay costs in our schools.

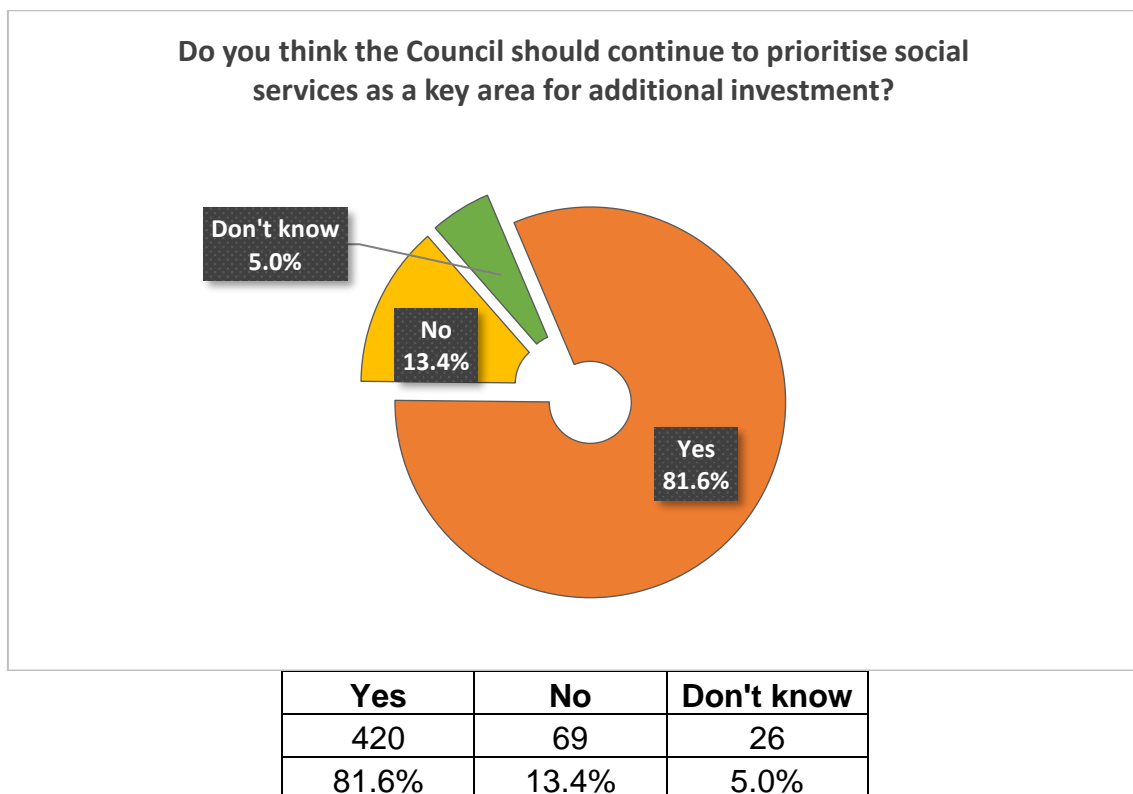


**Figure 1 - Schools Budget Increase**

The members of the Older Persons Advisory Group (OPAG) agreed, commenting that the Council should continue to provide sufficient resources to fully cover increased pay and non-pay cost pressures in schools as schools are vital for now and the future.

**Social Care budget**

4.5 81.6% of respondents agreed that the Council should continue to prioritise social services as a key area for additional investment.

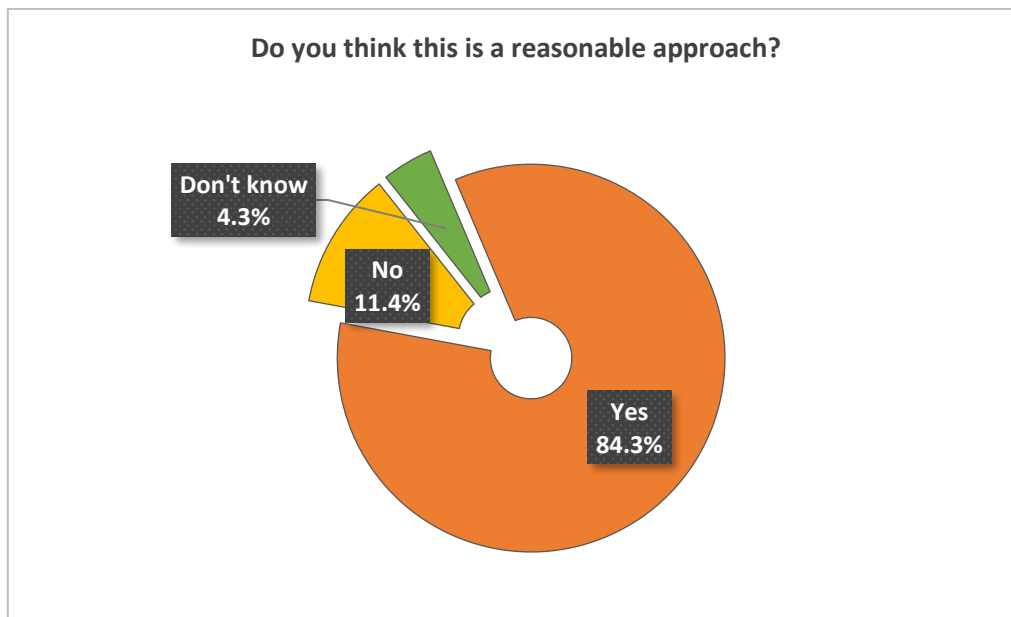


**Figure 2 - Prioritisation of Social Services for additional investment**

The members of OPAG advised that the Council should continue to prioritise social services as a key area for additional investment; however, queries were raised surrounding the issues with recruitment and retaining social workers and the Councils initiative to improve this going forward.

**Fees and Charges**

4.6 84.3% of respondents agreed that individual reviews of fees and charges is a reasonable approach for the Council to take.



Yes	No	Don't know
435	59	22
84.3%	11.4%	4.3%

**Figure 3 – Fees and Charges**

- 4.7 149 comments were received in relation to Fees and Charges, with the key themes being affordability, support for individual reviews of different fees and charges and views on different chargeable service areas. In general, commenters were in favour of protecting essential services and applying increases to non-essential services, but there is no consensus on which services are essential or not.
- 4.8 A selection of comments is presented here. The full text of all comments received in the consultation are available for Cabinet and Officers to view.

*No fees should increase by more than the increase % of Wages*

*Most definitely should be reviewed individually, or you will price facilities out of people reach*

*If you raise the prices too much usage will drop and you will not raise extra money.*

*Fees for things like parking, which for some are essential activities (Shopping working) need careful consideration. More discretionary activities should be considered separately especially where there is private sector provision for similar things.*

*Is there room for some charges to be waived for those on very low income? Pest Control for example.*





- 4.11 *Social care is extremely important to me and should be top priority along with health services. I am a firm believer that if you haven't got good health and well-being, you have nothing as this can impact on every aspect of your life.*

*Telephone contact with a human being as not everyone is able to or has access to use a computer for online contact*

*Online services, improved website functionality in regards to paying for things.*

*Keeping toilets open for disabled people. Keeping pavements clean and catching the perpetrators using cameras.*

*All statutory services, education, community, recycling (youth services if we had any!) - NOT important is the funding of an environmentally damaging and unnecessary road.*

*Free school meal payments to vulnerable households and regular refuse collection.*

*I think that more money should be put into providing good quality services*

*The online options are useful and should be maintained. The current refuse/recycling collections work well and are important*

A member of OPAG advised that they have all settled well with the use of technology during the pandemic. However, some advised of the difficulties of accessing and using technology during the pandemic and noted the need to provide alternatives to digital in order to enable everyone to get involved. A member advised of a need to introduce free WIFI across all towncentres as this will increase the use of technology.

- 4.12 Respondents were asked "Do you think the Council should consider changing the level of services for any of these and if so how?".

A selection of comments is presented here. The full text of all comments received in the consultation are available for Cabinet and Officers to view.

*Happy to consider services changes as long as they have a strong rationale and still allows Council to de-carbonise and reduce gap between rich and poor.*

*Yes, increase refuse collections or allow members of the public to drop off household waste and Recycling to a designated point, as the tips and Recycling centres won't take household waste*

*I think there should be a review of services and essential services should remain as is and non-essential should be reviewed. I'd suggest a consultation for what is deemed essential*

*No, these are what we pay council tax for and need our living areas to be well maintained*

*Look at selling buildings and place staff from that building into another one which is half full*

*Although some may not be used that much (certain libraries or mobile libraries for example) that doesn't take away from the importance of them for those who do use them and this should also be considered not just number of users. Combining services such as one 4 all centres / libraries/ leisure centres can reduce cost without having to reduce hours.*

*I do not think you should change refuse collections. Living in terraced houses, people do not have nowhere to store waste for longer than a week.*

*Provision should be protected at current levels. Investment should be made in 'green initiatives' within these service areas e.g., soft plastic recycling at the kerbside, incentives to encourage people to leave their car at home, improving energy efficiency of schools and leisure centres*

*Combining services to offer longer opening times. Leisure centres should have a bigger offering and make more money and should be part of a community centre that offers library services, local produce market, advice centre etc one stop shop instead of loads of inefficient buildings*

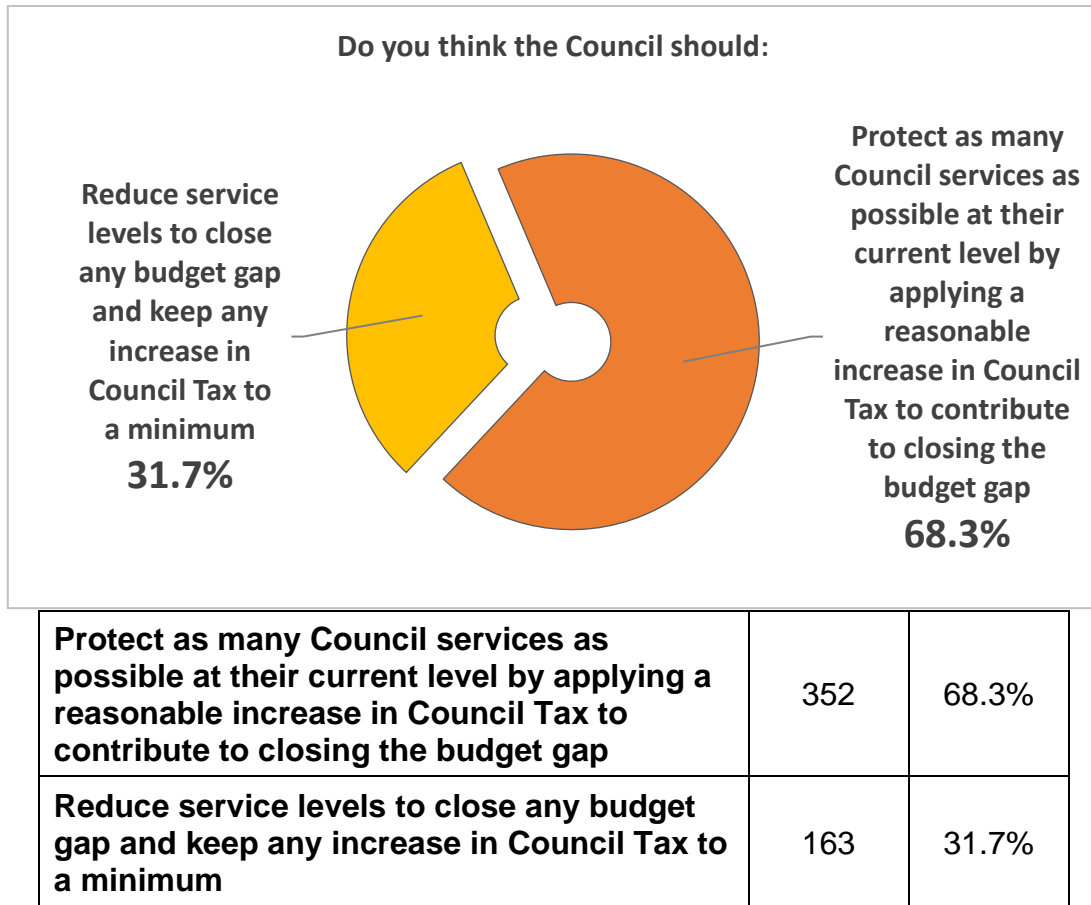
*The council should look to maximise the use of any facilities owned by schools. E.g., extend use of Treorchy comprehensive pool to the general public (as it's a heated pool and can be provided to the public outside school hours at nominal cost)*

### **Council Tax**

- 4.13 Respondents were asked whether they believe the Council should a) reduce service levels to close any budget gap and keep any increase in Council Tax to a minimum or b) protect as many Council services as possible at their current level by applying a reasonable increase in Council Tax to contribute to closing the budget gap.

68.3% of respondents answered that protecting services at current levels through a reasonable increase in Council Tax was preferable. 31.7% answered that they think the Council should cut services in order to minimise Council Tax increases.



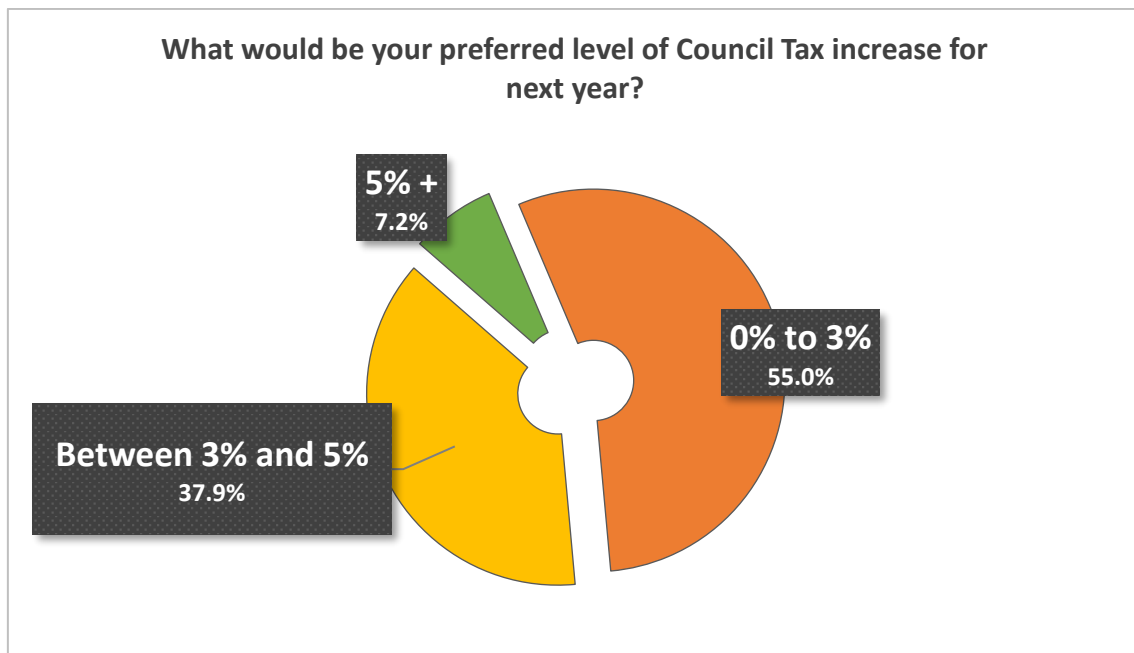


**Figure 6 – Council Tax**

In the budget meeting with OPAG, the group were in support of a Council Tax increase as it would provide the Council with further funding to support services which require it for instance social services.

Preferred level of Council Tax

4.14 Respondents were also asked to choose their preferred level of Council Tax increase for next year, with three options provided. 55% of respondents selected the lowest option of 0% - 3%, with 37.9% selecting the second band of between 3% and 5%. 7.2% of respondents selected the highest level of 5%+.



<b>0% to 3%</b>	283	55.0%
<b>Between 3% and 5%</b>	195	37.9%
<b>5% +</b>	37	7.2%

**Figure 7 – Preferred Level of Council Tax**

- 4.15 When asked for any general comments about Council Tax there were 200 responses. The majority of commenters voiced concern that any increase/large increases in Council Tax would add pressure to vulnerable and working families in RCT during the cost-of-living crisis, although many commenters also agreed that preserving service levels is very important. As in previous years, commenters often raised their perception that RCT Council Tax is already one of the highest in Wales and asked why further increases were necessary. Themes of efficiency, waste reduction and the need to reduce high levels of pay within RCT management structures were also raised a number of times.

A selection of comments is presented here. The full text of all comments received in the consultation are available for Cabinet and Officers to view.

*Council tax is too high for the services provided, at this time of economic crisis there should be no increase in this tax.*

*My household bills have increased dramatically over the last year, and I would be extremely disappointed in the Council if council tax were to increase more than 1% in March 2023. I feel an increase of more than 1% would be extremely worrying for hard working families, in a time whereby people are already struggling to make ends meet.*

*Council can't be put up and services cut - this would be unfair to all council tax payers*

*Council Tax rises are inevitable but the council must be mindful that many households cannot continue to cover these additional costs year on year. The current council tax system is unfair and should be revised. A family of 4 living in a 3-bedroomed house is paying the same each year as a couple living in a one bedroomed property in the same band.*

*It is my observation that many people do not know about all the services that are available to them through the council. It would be good to have regular area community meetings and 'coffee' events that promote the services, in person. Get the local people become used to the consistency and dependability on going to their local hwbs.*

*I feel that an above 2% rise would be acceptable to add as much to the pot as possible to make the cuts as light as possible.*

*With the cost of living rising at a rapid rate, families are already choosing between heating and eating. An increase in priority bills isn't what they need!*

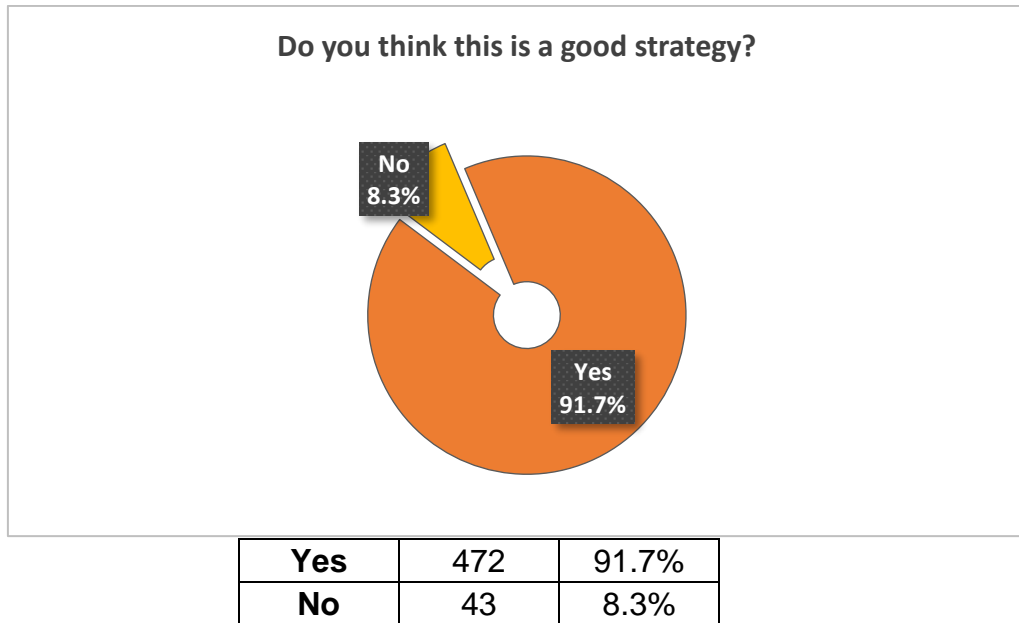
*Nobody's pay seems to go up. It would show compassion to hard working families if you can keep it at current levels.*

### **Efficiencies**

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

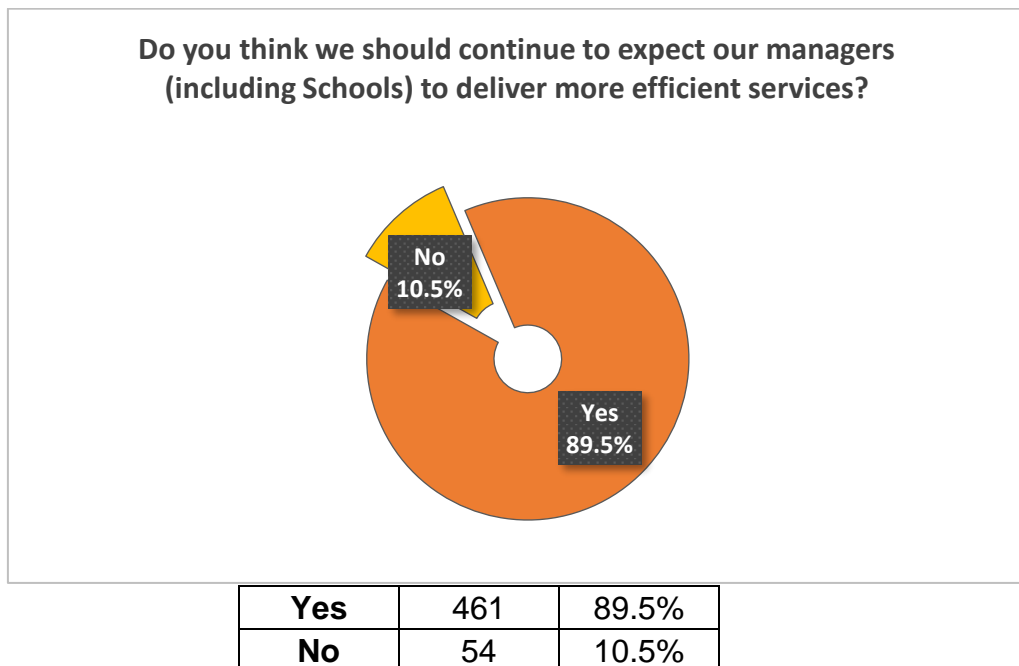
Each year in balancing our budget and ensuring the effective use of resources, all our service managers are required to contribute toward a council-wide efficiency (savings) target. This means that all of our services are becoming more efficient without impacting on front line services, and, over the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

The majority of respondents (91.7%) thought this was a good strategy.



**Figure 8 – Efficiency Strategy Agreement**

4.17 89.5% of respondents said that we should continue to expect our managers to deliver more efficient services in the future.



**Figure 9 – Manager Efficiency Agreement**

4.18 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.



**Figure 10 – Efficiency Comments**

- 4.19 The same major themes are present in the comments as in the previous year – many comments suggested selling and/ or permanently closing under-used or empty offices and encouraging more working from home to reduce estate costs.

A large proportion of commenters also raised the suggestions of cutting the level of senior and administrative staff, cutting salaries for senior managers and cutting salaries, expenses and overall numbers of Councillors.

A number of comments raise fears that constant drive towards efficiencies is translated into cuts in service provision, particularly in front-line services.

At a meeting of OPAG, the group were in support of efficiency strategies. A comment was raised regarding the Council being more efficient by selling buildings of value and empty properties. Another suggestion was made, which involved reducing waste and recycling collection to every 4 weeks compared to twice a week.

A selection of comments is presented here. The full text of all comments received in the consultation are available for Cabinet and Officers to view.

*More service areas should move online, especially for booking sport and leisure activities. The council should look to reduce its office space and create working spaces in building they need to keep open.*

*traffic and roadworks. I feel that planning isn't as efficient as it could be, and a lot of money and scope is used sub-contracting.*

*efficiency savings is a finite concept. It eventually reduces quality*

*Review levels of structure, more efficiency in processes - fewer senior managers, more ground level workers getting things done*

*Investing / developing more renewable energy locally I.e., utilise council. Land to build council owned solar farms / wind farms that reduces energy costs for council.*

*Yes reduce the amount of councillors. They are generally overpaid and not value for money. There should only be one in each town.*

*Amount of council buildings. Many councils have one big office / civic whereby 95% staff are based rather than buildings all over the place.*

*As long as being efficient does not mean job cuts and poorer services. Some departments, the only resource is staff*

*Councillors should be voluntary, and claim reasonable travel expenses, if paid then no expenses, how much is paid for a Mayor, not needed.*

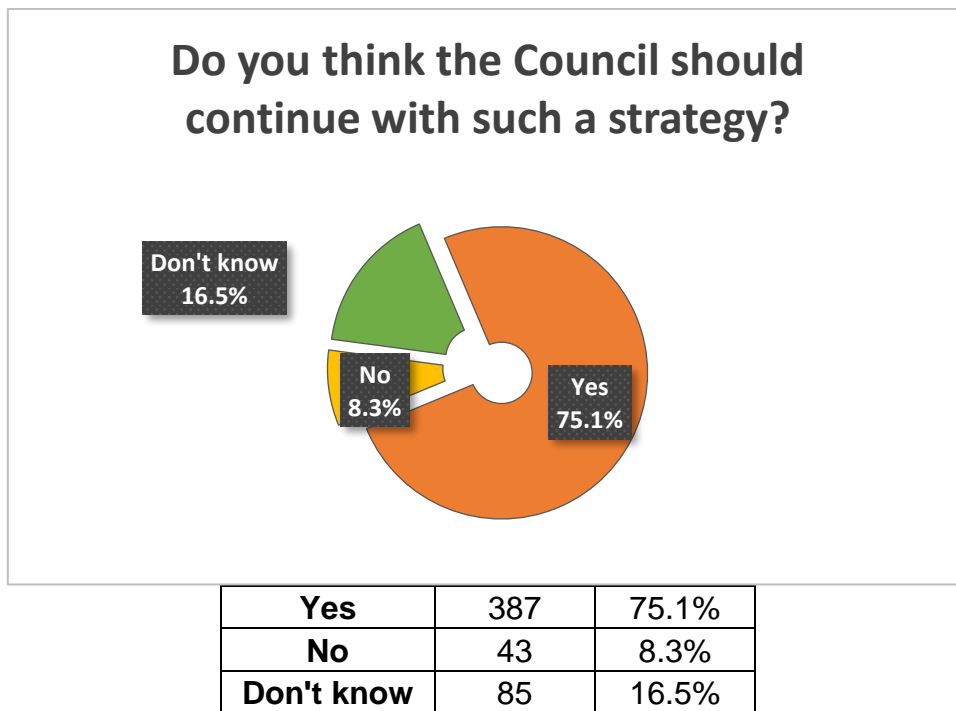
*Continued evaluation and implementation (where appropriate) of resource consolidation / utilisation with neighbouring councils where unnecessary duplication occurs - this is particularly important where capital expenditure / equipment is needed*

### **Council Reserves**

- 4.20 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. A significant amount of the Council's reserves are set aside for the three-year Capital Programme, which funds large investments and projects. The Council's General Reserve balances at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022 amounted to £10.2M. The level of general reserves are kept under on-going review alongside the financial risks the Council faces.

75.1% of respondents agreed that the Council should continue with this strategy.



**Figure 11 – Council Reserves Strategy**

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

A number of comments were received stating that reserves should be used to supplement the budget rather than saved. Other themes raised largely echo those already discussed in other open questions in this report, including building efficiencies, staffing, concern over cuts and so on. Multiple commenters raised a need for Welsh Government and Westminster to provide more funding to Councils.

Many of the commenters recognised the difficulties of reduced funding from central government and increased costs of providing services.

From OPAG, the group were in support of the strategy as they recognised the importance of Council reserves for issues such as flooding.

### **The Council's Priorities**

- 4.22 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*)

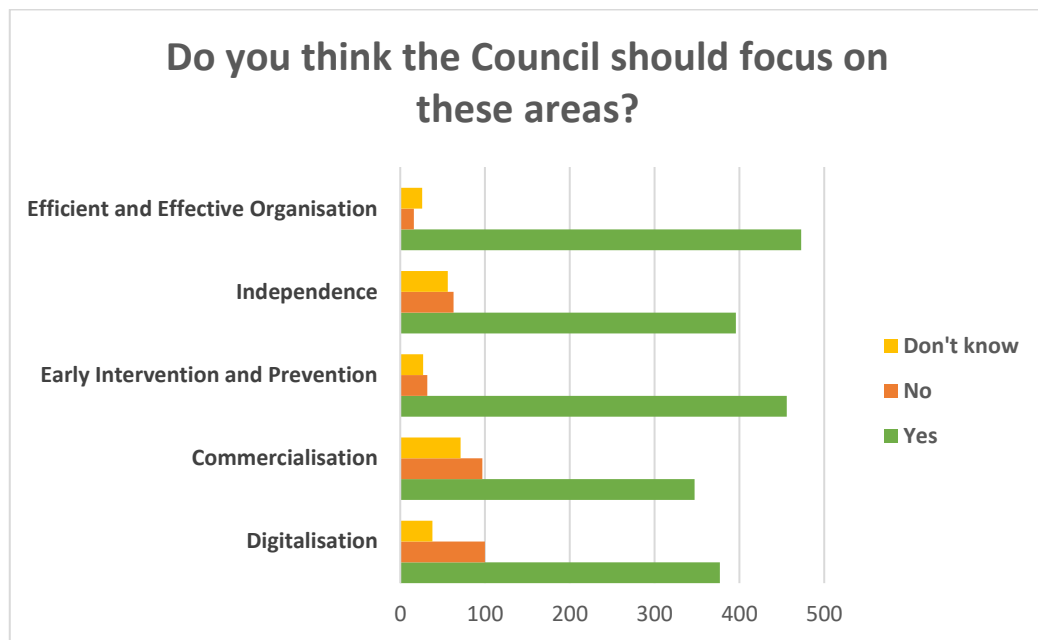
**Commercialisation** (*utilising our scale and expertise to deliver services for other organisations and customers and thereby generate income*)

**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*)

4.23 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 level of agreement being for Efficient and Effective Organisation (91.8%).



	Yes		No		Don't know	
Digitalisation	377	73.2%	100	19.4%	38	7.4%
Commercialisation	347	67.4%	97	18.8%	71	13.8%
Early Intervention and Prevention	456	88.5%	32	6.2%	27	5.2%
Independence	396	76.9%	63	12.2%	56	10.9%
Efficient and Effective Organisation	473	91.8%	16	3.1%	26	5.0%

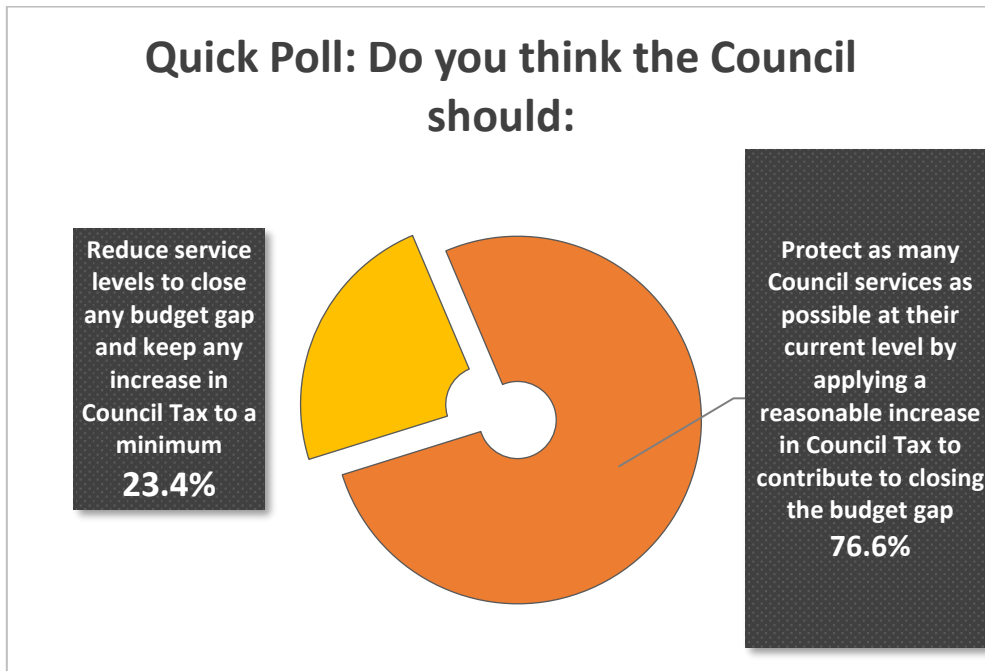
**Figure 12 – Council Areas of Focus**

Members of OPAG agreed that the council should focus on these 5 areas; however, noted that further support needs to be provided in relation to digitalisation as some households cannot afford WIFI. They suggested there is a need to introduce free WIFI across the Borough.



## Poll Results

- 4.24 In line with one of the survey question, visitors to the Let’s Talk Budget website were asked in a Quick Poll whether they believe the Council should a) reduce service levels to close any budget gap and keep any increase in Council Tax to a minimum or b) protect as many Council services as possible at their current level by applying a reasonable increase in Council Tax to contribute to closing the budget gap.
- 4.25 Of the 525 responses received, a majority of 76.6% (402) answered “Protect as many Council services as possible at their current level by applying a reasonable increase in Council Tax to contribute to closing the budget gap.”



Protect as many Council services as possible at their current level by applying a reasonable increase in Council Tax to contribute to closing the budget gap	402	76.6%
Reduce service levels to close any budget gap and keep any increase in Council Tax to a minimum	123	23.4%

**Figure 13 – Quick Poll 1: Council Tax Increase**

## **About You**

- 4.26 Respondents were asked to select one or more descriptor of their situation as an interested party in this consultation. The majority of respondents stated that they were local residents (85.8%), and 26.8% of respondents stated that they are employees of the Council.

<b>A local resident</b>	442	85.8%
<b>A local business</b>	18	3.5%
<b>An employee of the Council</b>	138	26.8%
<b>A member of a voluntary/ community group</b>	24	4.7%
<b>Other</b>	8	1.6%

**Figure 14 – Respondent Categories**

- 4.27 Respondents were asked whether they felt the proposals would impact them due to their protected characteristics. The majority of respondents did not state any perceived impact, did not reply or stated that they felt the question was irrelevant.

Amongst the replies that did identify a perceived impact, themes were: greater impact on older people due to reduced income and increasing cost of living; a negative impact on people with disabilities if services are cut; a greater impact on anyone facing reduced income or stagnant wages, whether due to age, disability or other circumstances; a loss of accessible services if opening hours/ times are reduced; a greater impact on single people and single parents due to increased bills and stagnant or reduced income; a greater impact on older or disabled people if waste collections are changed.

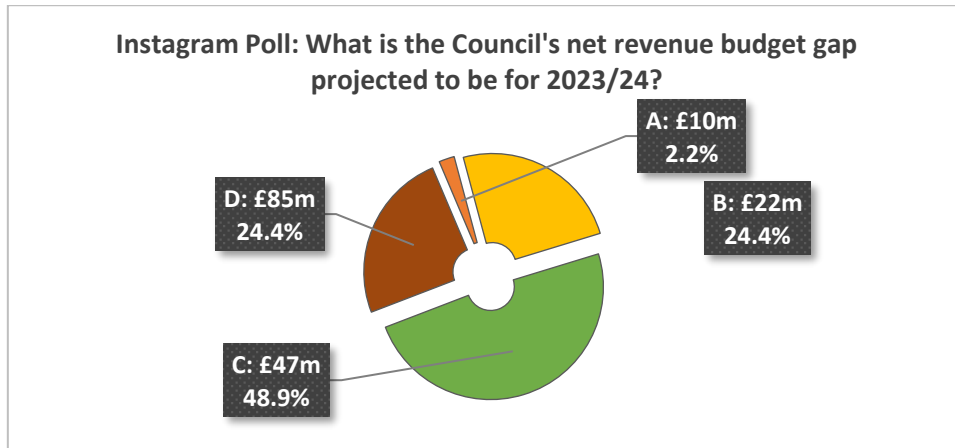
- 4.28 Respondents were asked whether they felt the proposals would impact the use or promotion of the Welsh Language, and how they felt the positive impacts on the Welsh Language could be increased. As with the previous question, the majority of respondents did not state any perceived impact, did not reply or stated that they felt the question was irrelevant.

Amongst the replies that did state a perceived impact or make suggestions, main themes included: appreciation for Council promotion of the Welsh Language; concern over the perceived costs of providing bilingual materials; a focus on children's Welsh Language learning.

**Instagram**

4.29 Four polls were also carried out via the Council's official Instagram account, receiving between 133 and 191 views each and between 45 and 3 responses each.

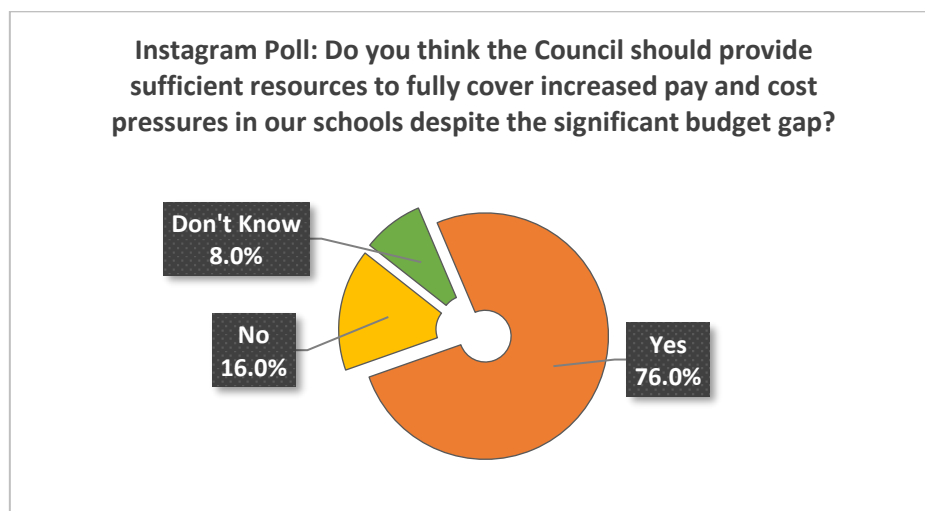
4.30 In the first poll, viewers were asked "What is the Council's net revenue budget gap projected to be for 2023/24?"



<b>A: £10m</b>	1	2.2%
<b>B: £22m</b>	11	24.4%
<b>C: £47m</b>	22	48.9%
<b>D: £85m</b>	11	24.4%

**Figure 15 – Instagram Poll 1 – Budget Gap**

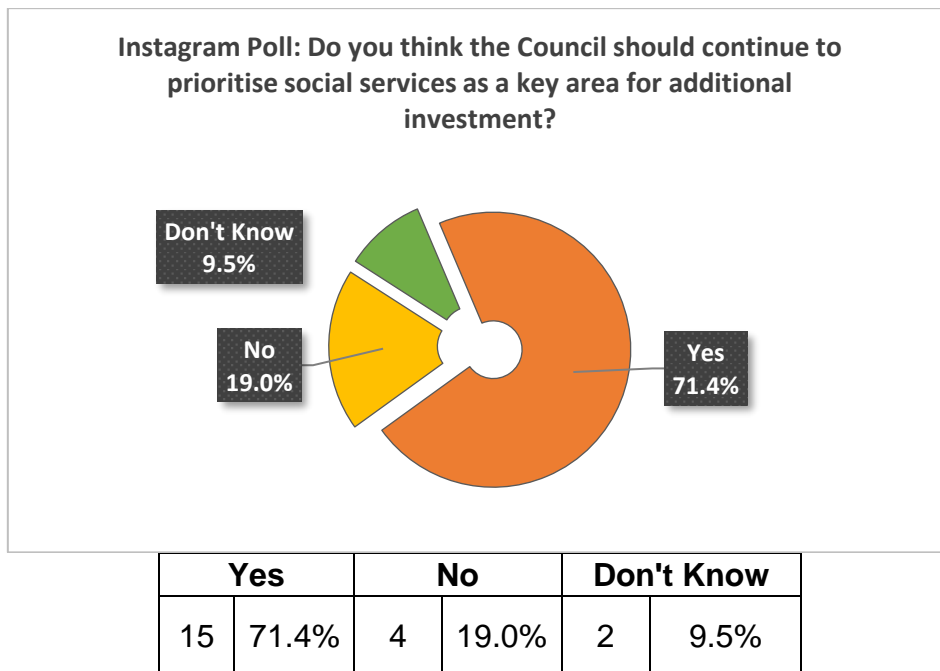
4.31 In the second poll, viewers were asked "Do you think the Council should provide sufficient resources to fully cover increased pay and cost pressures in our schools despite the significant budget gap?"



Yes		No		Don't Know	
19	76.0%	4	16.0%	2	8.0%

**Figure 16 – Instagram Poll 2 – Schools**

4.32 In the third poll, viewers were asked “Do you think the Council should continue to prioritise social services as a key area for additional investment?”



**Figure 17 – Instagram Poll 3 – Social Services**

4.33 In the final poll, viewers were asked:  
 Climate Change: Which areas should the Council focus on being more efficient in to reach our 2030 Net Zero target?

- Renewable Energy
- Waste
- Transport/Active Travel
- Biodiversity/Nature
- Development
- Raising Climate Awareness
- Working with Third Sector
- Sustainable Food

There were three responses to this question: “Buildings”, “Waste”, “Convert grass verges to meadow plant areas”.

## 5. Community Conversations

5.1 This section outlines the results of the three face-to-face engagement events which took place at the following locations:

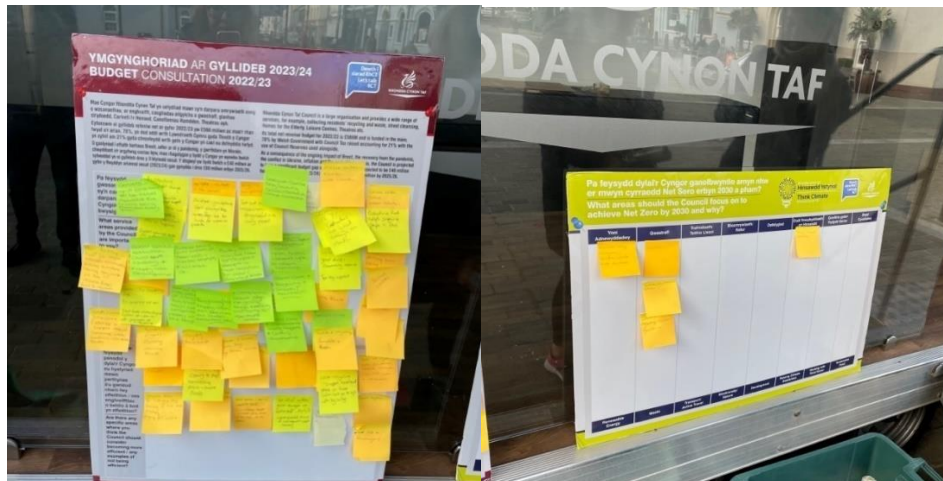
Trailer Event 1:	Pontypridd Mill Street	30/11/2022 (10-1pm)
Trailer Event 2:	Tonypandy Dunraven Street	2/12/2022 (9-12pm)
Trailer Event 3:	Aberdare Town Centre by Library	7/12/2022 (10-1pm)

Overall, 256 people engaged in phase 1 of the Councils Budget Consultation for 2023/24.

5.2 To engage with the public, recycling trailers were set at three different locations in RCT. Members of the public were invited to have discussions with Consultation and Finance Officers regarding the Councils budget for 2023/24, and how the Council can be more efficient as we move into the new financial year whilst facing a budget gap of £47 million. Two boards were used to engage with the public consisting of the following questions:

1. *What service areas provided by the Council are important to you?*
2. *Are there any specific areas where you think the Council should be more efficient / any examples of not being efficient?*
3. *What areas should the Council focus on to achieve Net Zero by 2030 and why?*

Figure 18 highlights how comments made by the public were gathered.



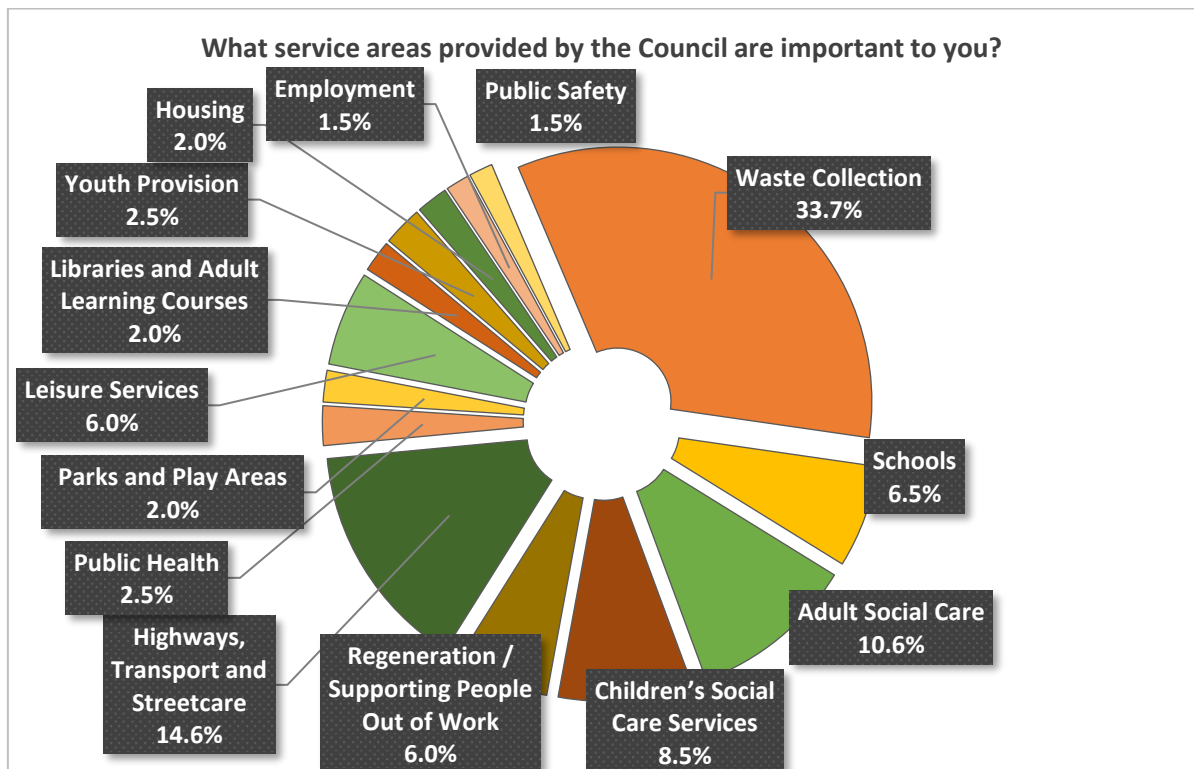
**Figure 18 – Public Engagement Board**

5.3 Comments received from the public in relation to other areas were also noted down and directed towards the relevant officers to action.

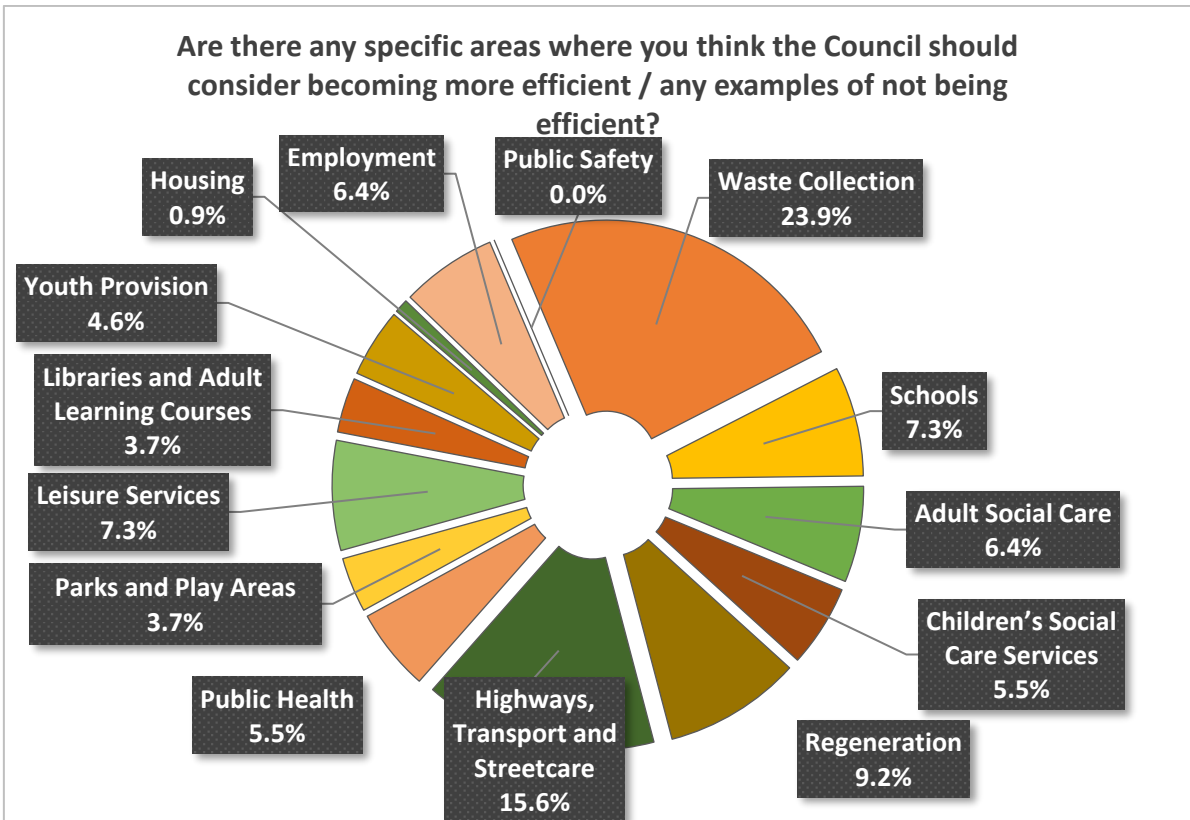
5.4 The comments noted during events were categorised into broader themes, as reported below. The full text of all comments received are available for Cabinet and Officers to view.

Waste and recycling dominated a number of comments, though it is important to note that the events took place in Waste and Recycling vehicles, and many people first approached staff in order to collect recycling bags or ask about these areas.

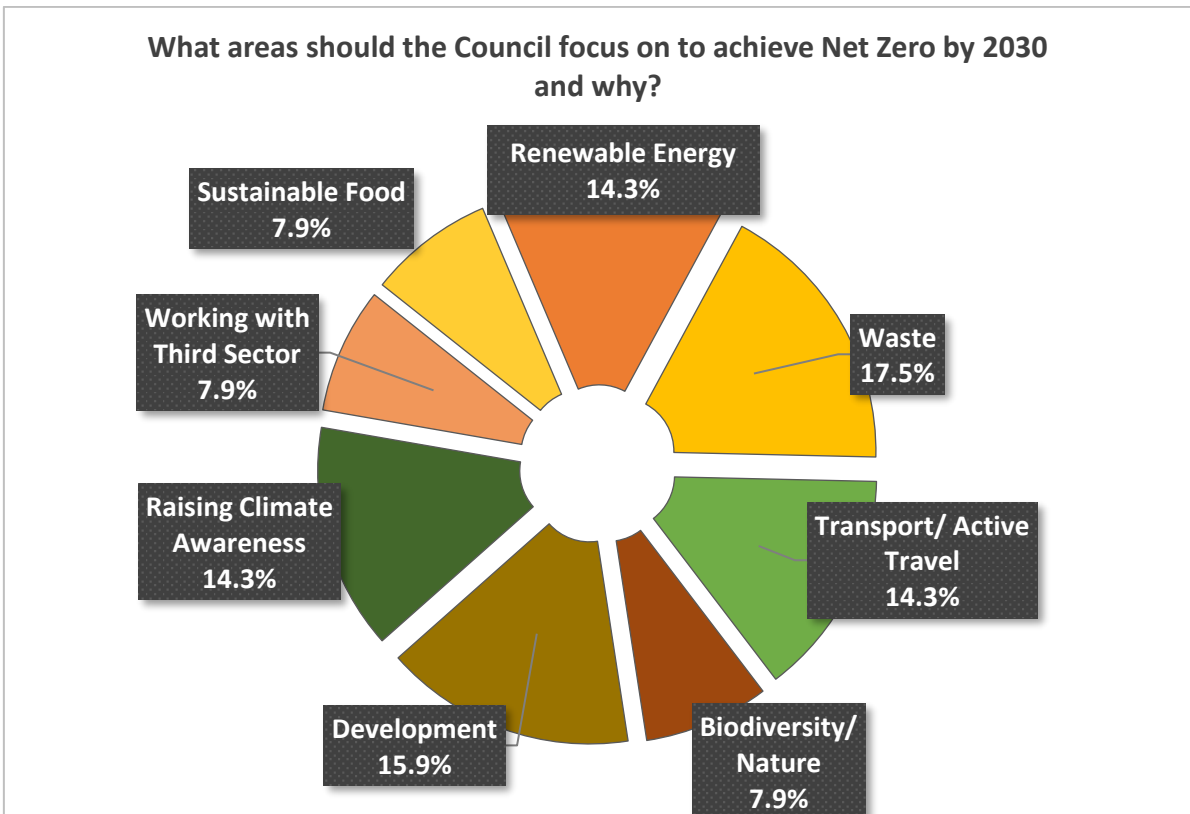
Many members of the community were concerned with care and services for older people, children and vulnerable people. Again, it is important to note that all of these events took place during weekday mornings and early afternoons, which appeared to affect the demographic of involvement. Staff reported that many of those who took part in the questions were older people and parents or carers of young children.



**Figure 19 – Service Areas**



**Figure 20 – Efficiencies**



**Figure 21 – Climate Change**

## 6. YOUNG PERSONS ENGAGEMENT

- 6.1 A face-to-face engagement exercise took place at St. John Baptist Church in Wales High School in Aberdare. Valuable insight was received on pupils' opinions towards the importance of Councils services and the Councils Budget towards schools in 2023/24.
- 6.2 The session was attended by members of the Consultation Team along with a Finance Officer. During the session the young people were taken through a short presentation with discussion prompts and questions from the full budget consultation.
- 6.3 The questions were centred towards Fees and Charges, Council Service Priorities, Efficiencies, and the School Budget. The session was well supported by their teacher and all young people engaged well with the format. A summary of their responses is highlighted below.
- 6.4 **Fees and Charges**

We asked the group whether they felt there should be changes to the range of Council fees and charges, providing the option for fees and charges to be frozen, decreased or increased and why.

**Fees & Charges**

- Fees and Charges provide income which can help the council to provide important services.
- The Council raises £23M a year from fees and charges to support services.

Which ones would you freeze / decrease / increase?  
Why?

Leisure Centre (Pay & Play)
Sport Club Playing Fees
Car Parking Charges
Cinema (Colliseum/Parc and Dare entrance fee)
Fines for dropping litter
Pontypridd Lido – (entry fee for adult users 16+)

Icons: A swimmer, a recycling symbol, a litter bin, and a film clapperboard.

Logo: HAVE YOUR DWEUD SAY EICH DWEUD

Figure 22 - Council Fees and Charges slide

### Comments included:

#### **Freeze**

*“Leisure Centres, Sport Club, Cinema and the Lido should be frozen as they are play an important role towards mental health, physical benefits and socialising”*

#### **Increase**

*“Increase litter fines to prevent people from littering in the streets”*



*“Increase car parking charges to encourage people to walk and it will be better for the environment as not so many fumes will be released into the air”*

*“Increase parking fines, and that money can be used towards other services which need it”*

6.5 There was a general agreement to increase charges for litter fines to deter people from dropping litter. Various comments highlighted the need to freeze services such as Leisure Centres, Sport Club fees and Lido Entrance as the students noted the importance of these services within a community to encourage socialisation, fitness, and good mental health. The group did note to increase car parking charges however recognised the impact this may have towards regeneration within town centres.

### 6.6 **Priorities**

We asked the group to identify Council services were important to them. We provided a list of service areas and discussions were held around which ones the group felt should be a priority for the Council.



**Figure 23 - Priorities presentation slide**

6.7 All students noted the most important services for the Council to maintain were Social Services, Schools, Public Health, Highways and Transport, Streetcare and Waste services. Surprisingly the students were not that concerned with Climate Change and advised that the Council should pause funding to climate changes at the moment and focus on other areas.

### **Comments included:**

*“Music services should not be a priority for the Council as it’s not that important at the moment.”*

*“Schools should introduce more opportunities for Drama lessons as those are not available for those in lower years”*

*“Climate Change should not be a focus at the moment, as the world is currently doing okay with climate change tackling, we can put a hold on it for now”*

*“Council should invest more money on creating more classes with fewer students to encourage more one to one session with teachers”*

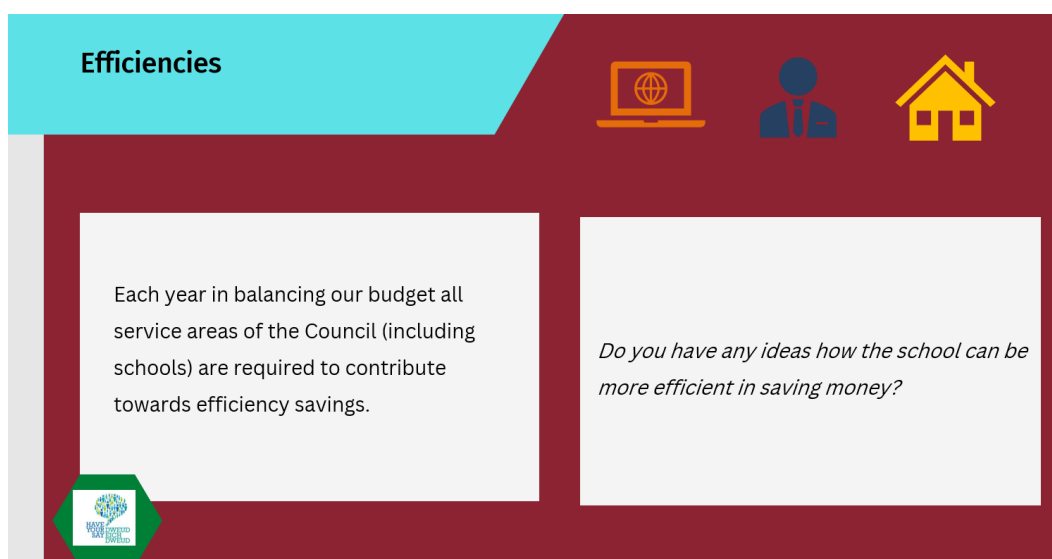
*“Aberdare Town Centre is dead; the Council should invest in the town centres so that young people have something to do”*

6.8 The group had a divide in terms of the provision of Music services offered in schools; some noted the importance of this services as a means of expression and increased confidence. The group noted the importance of the Council providing further funding towards Drama lessons within the lower classes as these lessons are not offered which is disappointing for some students.

6.9 Further funding on schools was seen as very important; students suggested the Council to build more classes with fewer students in order to encourage more one to one support with teachers. It was noted that there are too many students in one class which can be a distraction and reduce the amount of support provided.

#### 6.10 **Efficiencies**

As the Council faces a £47 million budget gap, we asked the group how they think their school could be more efficient in saving money. As part of the school being more efficient and saving money, the students advised the need for increased recycling within their schools, using less paper, car sharing for teachers, and ensuring to turn off the lights after using the room.



The slide features a teal header with the word 'Efficiencies' in white. To the right of the header are three icons: a laptop with a globe, a person in a suit, and a yellow house. Below the header, there are two white text boxes on a dark red background. The left box contains text about budget balancing, and the right box contains a question about school efficiency. A small circular logo is in the bottom left corner.

**Efficiencies**

Each year in balancing our budget all service areas of the Council (including schools) are required to contribute towards efficiency savings.

*Do you have any ideas how the school can be more efficient in saving money?*

**Figure 24 - Efficiencies presentation slide**


## 6.11 School Budget

We asked whether the group agreed with the Council's approach to protect and prioritise the schools' budget; they all agreed that the Council should continue to provide funding for schools. They advised that the additional funding has provided substantial improvements within schools, for instance more subjects being offered. They however emphasised a need to re-introduce drama classes within the lower classes.

**Schools**

- The Council aims to protect and increase the school budget.
- Since 2013/14 the overall schools' budget has increased by over 28% compared to the Council's overall budget increase by 11%.
- The Council is committed to continue to support schools and is proposing to increase the schools budget next year, covering increased pay costs and 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**

## 6.12 **Comments included:**

*“The Council should continue to provide this level of funding to schools every year”*

*“Schools are very important and should be maintained for us now and those coming after us”*

*“The Council should provide more funding towards drama lessons for the lower grades, it's very important”*

## 6.13 Instagram YEPS

### Instagram

Budget content was created and shared on the YEPS Instagram account. A total of 3 stories were shared aiming to get young people's views on Schools, Social Care, and Climate change. A link to the Let's Talk Budget Consultation was included within the post where young people could further engage by completing the main survey and polls.



**Figure 26 – YEPS RCT Instagram post for the Budget Consultation**

6.14 In total there were 23 young people who engaged with the social media posts, the table below highlights the number of views and those who participated per Instagram post:

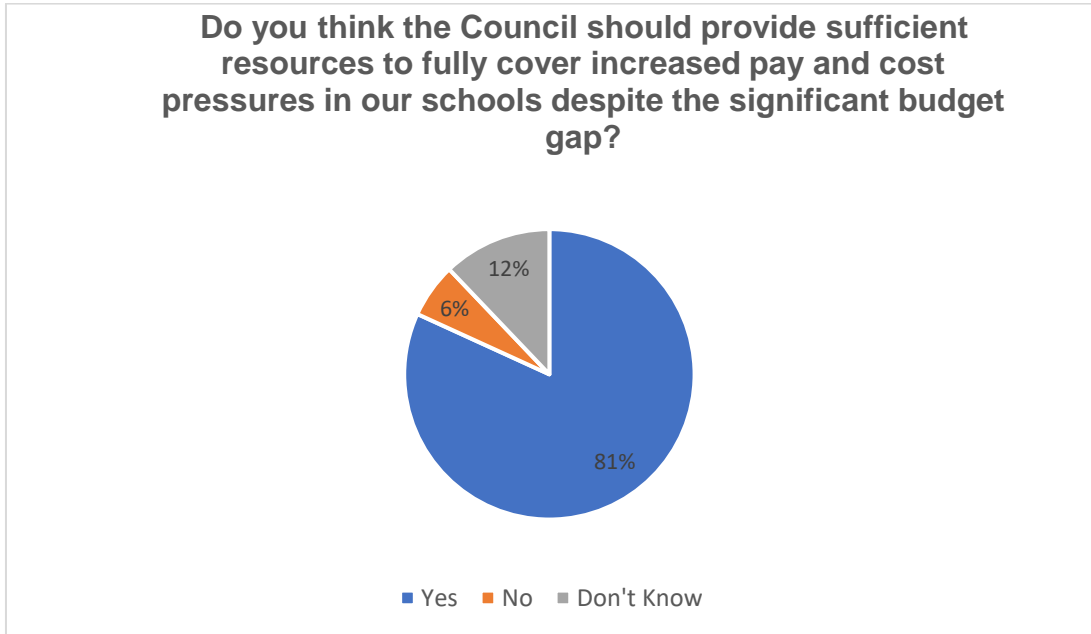
<b>Question:</b>	<b>Views</b>	<b>Number Engaged</b>
<p><b>Story 1:</b> Do you think the Council should provide sufficient resources to fully cover increased pay and cost pressures in our schools despite the significant budget gap?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Yes</li> <li>- No</li> <li>- Don't Know</li> </ul>	202	16
<p><b>Story 2:</b> Do you think the Council should continue to prioritise social services as a key area for additional investment?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Yes</li> <li>- No</li> <li>- Don't Know</li> </ul>	181	7
<p><b>Story 3:</b> Which areas should the Council focus on being more efficient in to reach our 2030 Net Zero target?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Renewable Energy</li> <li>- Waste</li> <li>- Transport/Active Travel</li> <li>- Biodiversity/Nature</li> <li>- Development</li> <li>- Raising Climate Awareness</li> <li>- Working with Third Sector</li> </ul> <p>Sustainable Food</p>	169	0

**Figure 27 - Instagram Story Views YEPS**

6.15 The Council has always aimed to maximise the resources it provides to schools; since 2013/14 the overall school's budget has increased by over 28% as compared to the Councils overall budget increasing by 11%. The total school budget is £147.9M for the financial year 2022/23. The Council is committed to continue supporting schools and is proposing to increase the schools budget next year.

6.16 Based on **Story 1**, 16 votes were received, the majority of which agreed that the Council should continue to provide resources for schools to cover pay and non-pay costs.

**Story 1: Councils Budget and Schools**

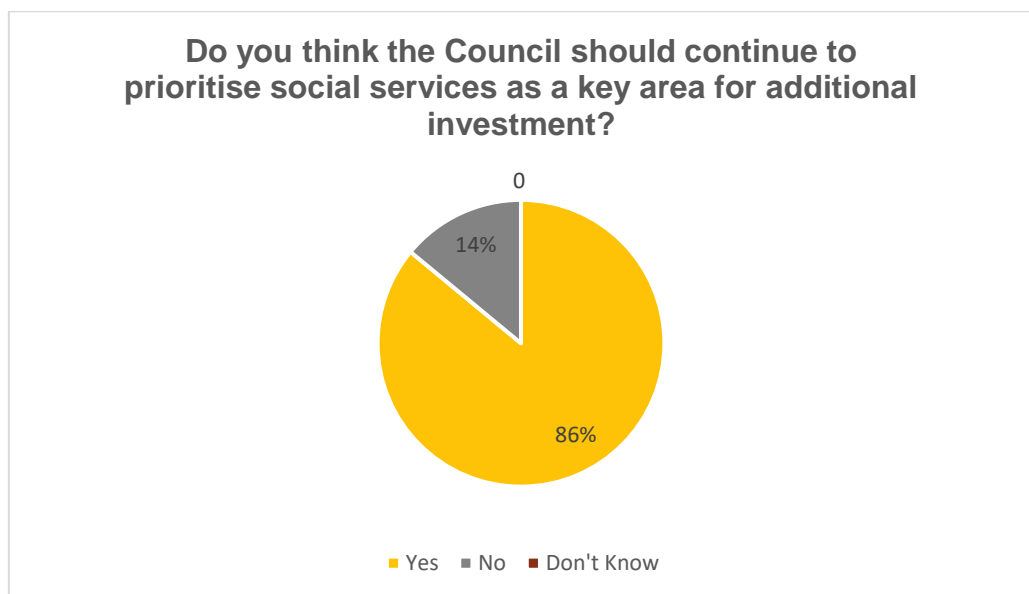


**Figure 28 – School Budget Instagram Story Poll**

6.17 The Council recognises the essential role social services play in supporting the most vulnerable people, families and children in our communities. Over 28% of the Councils budget supports Adult Social Services and Children’s Social Services. During the past three years, the budget for these areas has increased by £21M (around 15%).

6.18 Based on **Story 2**, 7 votes were received, the majority agreeing that Social Services should be a priority within the Council.

**Story 2: Councils Budget and Social Care**



**Figure 29 – Social Services Instagram poll**

6.19 The Council is committed to reaching its target of being Net Zero by 2030; In order to do so, the Council will be focusing on a variety of areas:

- Renewable Energy
- Waste
- Transport/Active Travel
- Biodiversity/Nature
- Development
- Raising Climate Awareness
- Working with Third Sector
- Sustainable Food

6.20 As part of the **Story 3**, there was no engagement from young people regarding how the Council could achieve its Net Zero target by 2030.

---