



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET

23rd OCTOBER 2023

ENGAGEMENT ON THE COUNCIL'S BUDGET 2024/25

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

Author: Chris Davies, Corporate Policy & Consultation Manager

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 2024/25 budget setting process.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Cabinet:

- 2.1 Support the further continuation of the approach to the Council's budget consultation introduced in recent years, utilising the Council's 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 launch of a phase 1 budget consultation during the Autumn of 2023, in advance of the Welsh Government provisional budget settlement timescales, currently expected around mid-December.
- 2.4 Authorise the Service Director – Democratic Services & Communications to plan in detail the necessary timeline for

engagement, , in consultation with the appropriate Cabinet Member & Deputy Chief Executive and Group Director for Finance, Digital and Frontline Services.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 To provide residents with the opportunity to provide feedback to the Cabinet on the 2024/25 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 range of face-to-face events in the community across the County Borough, as well as increased social media and digital engagement. Over 2,000 people were involved in last year's 2023/24 budget consultation process.
- 4.3 The widespread approach we use and the range of views we capture provides senior managers and Cabinet with the necessary information they need to inform budget setting for the year ahead. In addition, we have found that the information we collect is also valuable for service managers to use for their service planning and development.
- 4.4 The 2024/25 annual budget consultation will continue to use a range of methods to engage with the community. 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.
- 4.5 It is therefore proposed that the approach outlined in section 5 below is utilised for the 2024/25 budget consultation process.

5. PROPOSED ENGAGEMENT APPROACH

- 5.1 The 2024/25 budget consultation will take place in 2 phases. The first phase will take place in the Autumn of 2023 and will aim to collect views on the Councils' investment priorities, council tax levels and efficiency savings. The phase 1 process enables the Cabinet time to

consider the initial feedback received assisting in the development of a draft Budget Strategy for 2024/25.

- 5.2 Phase 2 will take place early in the New Year 2024 and will engage with residents on this draft strategy. The specific dates are dependent on the release dates of the Welsh Government Settlement.
- 5.3 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.
- 5.4 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.
- 5.5 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.
- 5.6 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.
- 5.7 Emails will be distributed to all key stakeholders (including the Council's Citizens' Panel, Councillors, staff etc.).
- 5.8 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.
- 5.9 The RCT Together Team facilitates 12 Neighbourhood Networks across the borough and these Networks provide a point of contact to respond to resident and community support. The Networks are local partnerships of council staff, organisations and local groups that are working together to deliver services and activities and to develop communities further. As part of the Council's Budget Consultation Process, we aim to provide presentations with a number of the

Networks, where we will take feedback from partners and provide an opportunity to engage with Cabinet Members and Senior Officers.

5.10 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

5.11 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.
- Paper surveys and information available on request.
- Consultation freepost address for postal responses.
- Plan English Documents – These will be produced and placed online as well as being available in paper copy on request.

5.12 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

5.13 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 stakeholders 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 from the Contact Centre or at libraries.

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 and the introduction of the Let's Talk digital platform has increased the range of engagement in the budget consultation process through a more interactive and varied approach.
- 12.2 The approach outlined in this report seeks to continue our positive conversations, by ensuring that all residents and service users have the 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 2024/25 Revenue Budget Strategy. A phase 2 consultation will then take place on the draft strategy itself.

Other Information: -

Relevant Scrutiny Committee: Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Contact Officer: Chris Davies