



2024/25 BUDGET (PHASE 1)

Consultation Report

Rhondda Cynon Taf CBC

December 2023



CONTENTS

	<u>Section</u>	Page
	Executive Summary	4
1.	Introduction	7
2.	Background	8
3.	Methodology	9
4.	Let's Talk Budget - Questionnaire - Polls	11
5.	Community Conversations	28
6.	Young Person Engagement - Schools	33

FIGURES AND TABLES

Figures	Page
Figure 1 – School budget increase	12
Figure 2 - Prioritisation of Social Services for additional investment	12
Figure 3 – Fees and Charges	13
Figure 4 – Comments on Fees and Charges	14
Figure 5 – Comments on Council Services	15
Figure 6 – Council Tax	17
Figure 7 – Council Tax Level	19
Figure 8 – Efficiency Strategy Agreement	20
Figure 9 – Efficiency Comments	22
Figure 10 – Manager Efficiency Agreement	23
Figure 11 – Council Reserves Strategy	23
Figure 12 – Council Areas of Focus	25
Figure 13 – Quick Poll 1: Council Tax Increase	26
Figure 14 – Respondent Categories	27
Figure 15 – Trailer	28
Figure 16 – Comments Received at Face-to-Face Events	29
Figure 17 - Council Fees and Charges slide	33
Figure 18 - Priorities presentation slide	35
Figure 19 - Efficiencies presentation slide	39
Figure 20 - Schools Budget presentation slide	39

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- This section provides a summary of the main findings from the Phase 1 Budget Consultation 2024/25.
- The consultation was conducted in-house and ran from the 14th November to 19th December 2023.
- The following methods were used;
 - 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 an online poll and a survey.
 - An email was sent to a range of key stakeholders to promote the consultation.
 - A number of face-to-face engagement events were held across the county borough.
 - 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.
 - Consultation freepost address for postal responses.
 - An “Easy Read” document of the budget documents, online and available on request (in both Welsh and English).
 - A discussion and presentation was held with the Older Persons Advisory Group (OPAG) and the RCT Disability Forum.
 - We engaged with young people at three schools in Rhondda Cynon Taf: Tonyrefail Community School, Aberdare Community School and Treorchy Comprehensive School.
- A total of 166 completed surveys were received and 104 Poll responses.
- Respondents were asked to choose one of two options with regards to school funding– only providing sufficient resources to fully cover increased pay costs or providing additional funding over and above pay cost increases as a contribution to non-pay pressures. Respondents were almost equally split, with 50.3% in favour of pay cost funding only and 49.7% in favour of additional funding.
- 81.1% of respondents agreed that the Council should continue to prioritise social services as a key area for additional investment.
- 82.3% of respondents agreed that individual reviews of fees and charges is a reasonable approach for the Council to take.
- The feed back provided on Fees and Charges was around the themes of affordability, cost of living crisis, support for individual reviews of different fees and charges and views on different chargeable service areas.
- Respondents were asked “What service areas provided by the Council are important to you?”. Social care and support for vulnerable people were reported the most in the comments, along with schools, libraries, waste and

recycling collection, and leisure services. Online services were also seen to be important to residents, as long as there were alternatives for those who are not online.

- Respondents were asked whether they believe the Council should a) protect as many Council services as possible by applying a reasonable increase in Council Tax to contribute to closing the budget gap or b) reduce service levels to close any budget gap and keep any increase in Council Tax to a minimum. 75.6% of respondents answered that protecting services at current levels through a reasonable increase in Council Tax was preferable. 24.4% answered that they think the Council should reduce service levels in order to minimise Council Tax increases.
- When asked for any general comments about Council Tax the majority of respondents 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. However, there were those in agreement that there should be a level of increase to preserve service levels.
- Respondents were asked - “a number of local authorities in Wales are likely to be consulting on 5%+ council tax increases for the 2024/25 financial year but in Rhondda Cynon Taf we are looking to propose less than 5%. For Rhondda Cynon Taf, do you agree that an increase of between 3% and 5% is acceptable given the financial pressures faced?”

68.1% of respondents said that yes, they believe this level of rise is acceptable. 22.7% said no, and a further 9.2% said they did not know.

- 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 having a significant impact on frontline services, recognising that this is becoming increasingly more difficult each year. As part of the Council’s on-going review of service delivery, £38M of budget reductions have been delivered over the last 3 years, the majority of which have not impacted on frontline services.

The majority of respondents (82.5%) thought this was a good strategy.

- 81.1% of respondents said that we should continue to expect our managers to deliver more efficient services in the future.
- 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, over 50%, are set aside for the three-year Capital Programme, which funds large investments

and projects. The Council's General Reserve balances at 31st March 2023 amounted to £10.24M. The level of general reserves are kept under on-going review alongside the financial risks the Council faces.

63.6% of respondents agreed that the Council should continue with this strategy.

- In line with one of the survey questions, 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. A majority of 69.2% 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 500 people took part in the various engagement activities carried out during the phase 1 consultation.

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This report presents the findings of the Phase 1 Budget Consultation 2024/25.
- 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 inform setting 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 2024/25 budget strategy consultation processes.
- 2.4 This report presents the findings of phase 1 of the budget consultation, where views were sought on:
- The Schools Budget
 - The Social Care Budget
 - Fees and charges levels
 - Service Levels
 - The level of Council Tax increase
 - Delivering more efficient services
 - Council priorities
 - Council reserves; and
 - Council Tax Reduction Scheme
- 2.5 Phase 1 of the Council's budget consultation ran from the 14th November to 19th December 2023.
- 2.6 Phase 2 of the consultation will commence in January 2024 and will seek to obtain views on the proposed Budget Strategy for 2024/25.

3. METHODOLOGY

- 3.1 The 2024/25 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 14th November to 19th December 2023 and collected views on key areas including schools' budgets, the social care budget, fees and charges, council tax levels and efficiency savings. This report will be presented to Cabinet and Officers to consider the feedback received as part of developing a draft Budget Strategy for 2024/25. Phase 2 will take place in the New Year and will engage with residents on the draft Budget 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 an online poll and a survey.
- 3.3 An email was sent to a range of key stakeholders to promote the consultation.
- 3.4 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 Town Centre (Mill Street)	22/11/2023
Trailer Event 2:	Tonypany Town Centre (Dunraven Street)	29/11/2023
Trailer Event 3:	Aberdare Town Centre (next to Aberdare Library)	6/12/2023

- 3.5 We continued to consider those having reduced or no access to the internet and those who prefer to engage through traditional methods via:
- 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.
- 3.6 We also produced an "Easy Read" document of the budget documents, online and available on request (in both Welsh and English).

- 3.7 A discussion and presentation was held with the Older Persons Advisory Group (OPAG) and the RCT Disability Forum.
- 3.8 We engaged with young people at three schools in Rhondda Cynon Taf: Tonyrefail Community School, Aberdare Community School and Treorchy Comprehensive School. The sessions were attended by members of the Consultation Team along with a Finance officer. During the sessions a presentation was shared with the young people with discussion prompts and questions from the full budget consultation. Valuable insight was received on students' opinions regarding the importance of the Council's services and the School budget for 2024/25.
- 3.9 The Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee , Joint Consultative Committee and School Budget Forum were consulted (the minutes of which have not been included in this report).
- 3.10 In addition to the above, all elected 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.
- 3.11 Over 500 people were engaged in the phase 1 budget consultation.

4 Let's Talk Budget

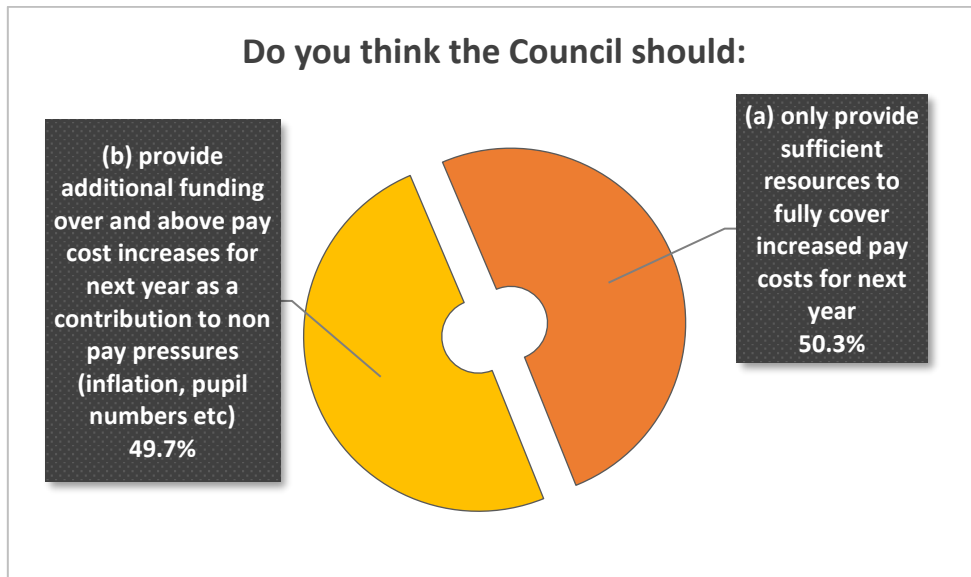
- 4.1 The following section outlines the results from the online consultation carried out on the Let's Talk Budget website.
- 4.2 There were two ways for page visitors to engage with the consultation. Firstly, via a full survey and secondly via a stand-alone Quick Poll question on the level of Council Tax to capture additional responses from site visitors who did not choose to complete the full survey.

Survey Results

- 4.3 A total of 166 completed surveys were received. 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 Respondents were asked to choose one of two options with regards school funding for the coming year: only providing sufficient resources to fully cover increased pay costs or providing additional funding over and above pay cost increases as a contribution to non-pay pressures. Respondents were almost equally split, with 81 (50.3%) in favour of pay cost funding only and 80 (49.7%) in favour of additional funding.

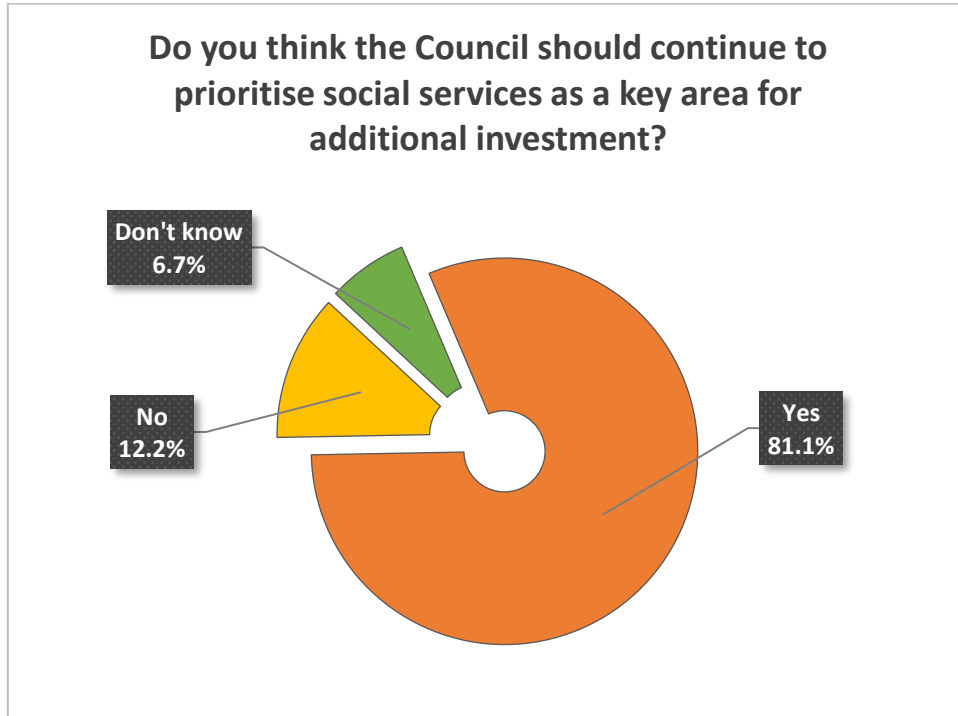


Q1 Do you think the Council should:	Count	Percentage
(a) only provide sufficient resources to fully cover increased pay costs for next year	81	50.3%
(b) provide additional funding over and above pay cost increases for next year as a contribution to non pay pressures (inflation, pupil numbers etc)	80	49.7%
	161	

Figure 1 - Schools Budget Increase

Social Care budget

4.5 81.1% of respondents agreed that the Council should continue to prioritise social services as a key area for additional investment.

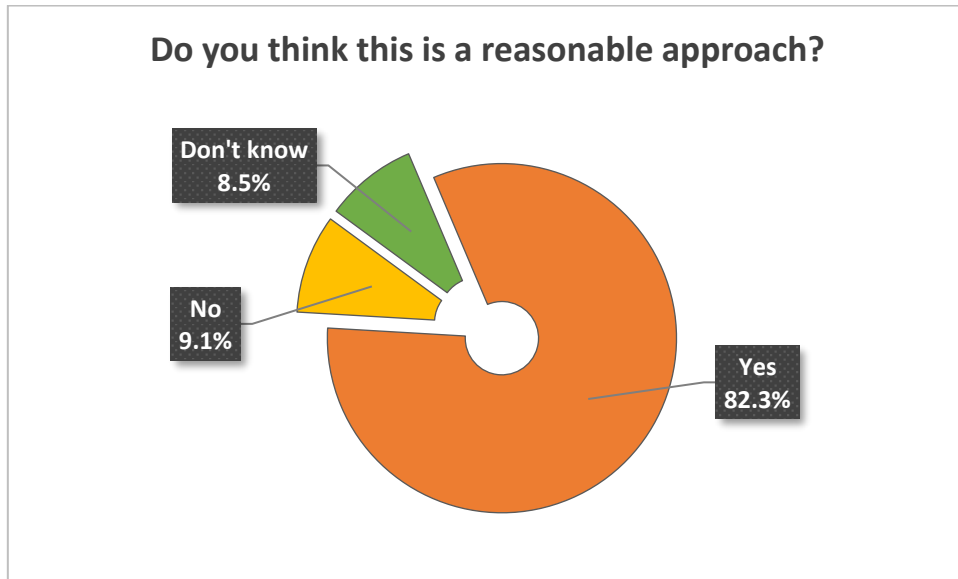


Q2 Do you think the Council should continue to prioritise social services as a key area for additional investment?	Count	Percentage
Yes	133	81.1%
No	20	12.2%
Don't know	11	6.7%
	164	

Figure 2 - Prioritisation of Social Services for additional investment

Fees and Charges

- 4.6 82.3% of respondents agreed that individual reviews of fees and charges is a reasonable approach for the Council to take.



Q3 Do you think this is a reasonable approach?	Count	Percentage
Yes	135	82.3%
No	15	9.1%
Don't know	14	8.5%
	164	

Figure 3 – Fees and Charges

- 4.7 52 comments were received in relation to Fees and Charges, with the key themes being affordability, cost of living crisis, support for individual reviews of different fees and charges and views on different chargeable service areas.

In general, respondents were in favour of protecting essential services and applying small increases to non-essential services where needed

- 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.

“Where possible price increases should be kept as low as possible. People are really struggling with the constant rising costs.”

“Keep increases to 5% or below”

“.....it is expected that prices will increase year on year. My personal opinion is that 5% should be the ceiling”.

“Agree need to be considered individually. Because the more you increase charges, the more impact on people and residents who are already struggling.”

“Unfortunately utility charges have skyrocketed, I think it's more than reasonable for fees and charges to increase as well.”

“The cost is increasing but there are no improvements being made”

“I agree that some fees and charges need to rise in relation to the rising costs but please do think carefully about whether any rises/introduced fees will adversely affect working parents and the lower middle class.....”

“Fees and charges are a source of income and most people accept an increase if it will help towards maintaining essential services.”

4.9 The relative frequencies of themes are illustrated in the graphic below.



Figure 4 – Comments on Fees and Charges

Service Levels

- 4.10 Respondents were asked “**What service areas provided by the Council are important to you?**”, as an open-text question. 127 individual comments were received, covering a wide range of services and included some mention of non-Council services such as policing. The graphic below demonstrates the relative frequency of key words in comments received, with some editing to remove non-Council themes.

Social care and support for vulnerable people were reported the most in the comments, along with schools, libraries, waste and recycling collection, and leisure services. Online services were also seen to be important to residents, as long as there were alternatives for those who are not online.

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



Figure 5 – Comments on Council Services

4.11 Comments included;

“Transport, Schools all social care services both children and adults. Funding for disabled children in mainstream and alternative provision. much more funding is needed in schools.”

“Street cleansing, litter picking, overgrowth cut backs - as they all help prevent the 'broken window' syndrome and therefore save money having to be spent tackling ASB etc.”

“Schools and social care as these effect the most vulnerable in the population with the least or smallest voice compared to other vocal groups that may be better able to cope with changes or cuts”.

“online services are important but don't alienate people who aren't tech savvy”

“Leisure, if people are more physically active it would potentially reduce the strain on health care and social services, it can also be a means of social occasion.”

“Children's services and supporting elderly people to remain in their homes as long as possible.”

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.

The main themes were around reducing the number of offices owned by the Council, changes to opening times and hours worked and the need to increase the use of digital services for residents.

“you should ensure that all residents are able to access services via the internet.”

“RCT could also extend its use of electronic communication. For eg - letters were sent to all registered households re the changes to winter green waste collections - this could have been done electronically, if emails etc had been collected at the time of registration”.

“....it seems like majority of office buildings could be utilised better maybe offering space to bring in money for the council where many areas of the business could work from home.....”

“Yes opening and closing times should be regularly reviewed and changed according to demand and time of year.”

“Yes need to look at footfall to decide on whether it's worth keeping the service open for long hours”.

“Shouldn't reduce opening times of libraries, as these are: warm venues where families can meet others, and where they can access other levels of support.”

“I'd say reviewing the frequency that services are provided and adjust according if someone is/isn't being used as much.”

Council Tax

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

75.6% of respondents answered that protecting services at current levels through a reasonable increase in Council Tax was preferable. 24.4% answered that they think the Council should reduce service levels in order to minimise Council Tax increases.

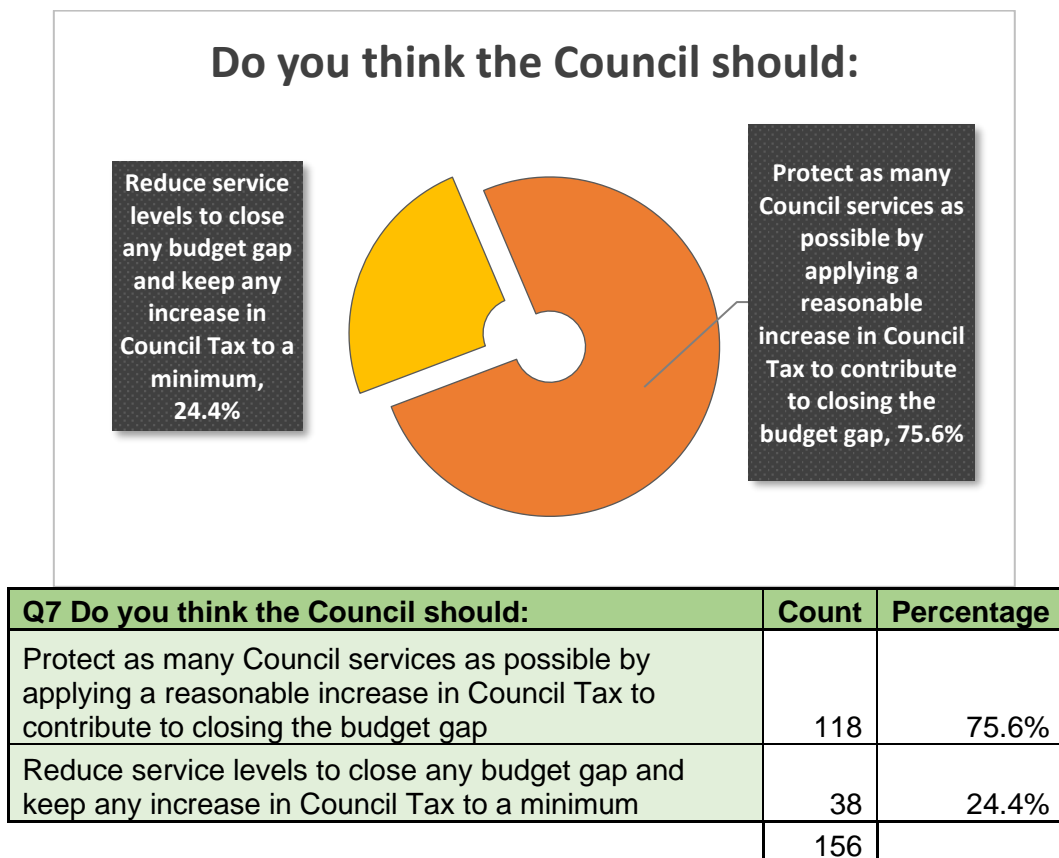


Figure 6 – Council Tax

4.14 When asked for any general comments about Council Tax there were 58 responses.

The majority of respondents 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. However, there were those in agreement that there should be a level of increase to preserve service levels.

As in previous years, commenters often raised their perception that Council Tax is already one of the highest in Wales and asked why further increases were necessary.

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.

“Working class cant afford a massive increase and that's who it will impact so services need to reduce to fund the gap”

“This tax is already far too high to justify a further increase this year”

“The cost of living crisis is impacting on all households, which needs to be considered”

“Reducing service levels will have long term negative impacts on many. As the UK Government is not supportive of local services, we need to try and maintain these in other ways. Unfortunately, raising Council Tax is one option.”

“People can't afford higher increases in every household bill every year including C. Tax, so keep the increase down to a reasonable rate.....”

“It is frustrating to pay increased council tax as services are being reduced but its better than having further cuts to services”

“Increase Council tax to alleviate the pressures in some way as I can't see how services can be reduced further than they are”

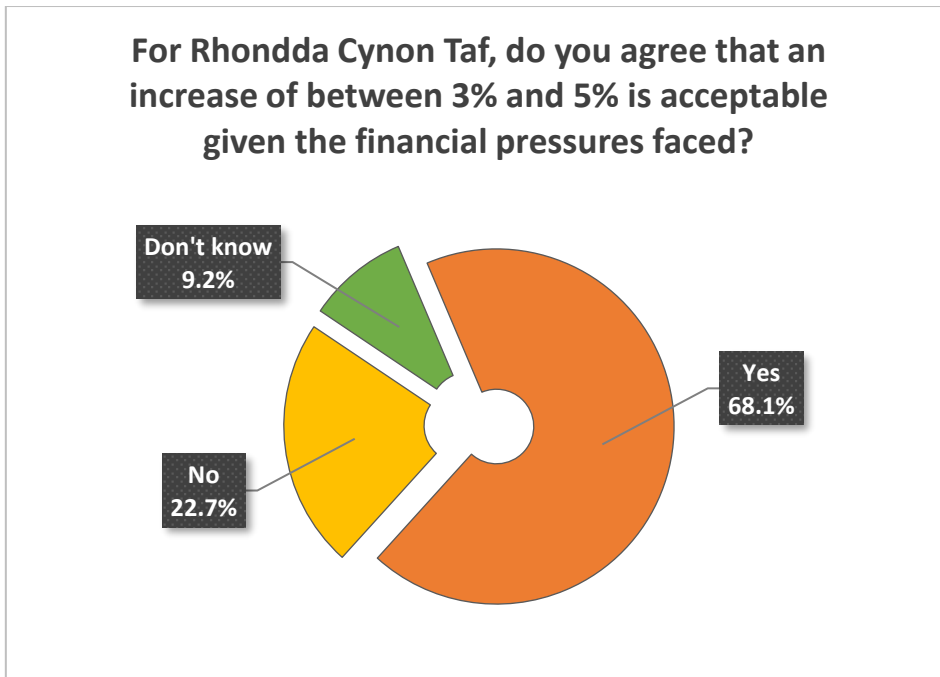
“If we want services in RCT, I think it is the only way to raise the funds necessary to reduce the overall costs but I worry for people on low incomes and families with children and mortgages. It is not an easy time.”

“i feel a rise to about 5% needs to be considered - while ensuring any relevant discounts are upheld for people who live alone or have financial support.”

“A slightly larger increase in council tax is acceptable to me, especially if it means contributing to keeping services for the elderly and marginalised open, and also the community hubs and libraries”

4.15 Respondents were then asked “a number of local authorities in Wales are likely to be consulting on 5%+ council tax increases for the 2024/25 financial year but in Rhondda Cynon Taf we are looking to propose less than 5%. For Rhondda Cynon Taf, do you agree that an increase of between 3% and 5% is acceptable given the financial pressures faced?”

68.1% of respondents said that yes, they believe this level of rise is acceptable. 22.7% said no, and a further 9.2% said they did not know.



Q9 For Rhondda Cynon Taf, do you agree that an increase of between 3% and 5% is acceptable given the financial pressures faced?	Count	Percentage
Yes	111	68.1%
No	37	22.7%
Don't know	15	9.2%
	163	

Figure 7 – Council Tax Level

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 having a significant impact on frontline services, recognising that this is becoming increasingly more difficult each year. As part of the Council’s on-going review of service delivery, £38M of budget reductions have been delivered over the last 3 years, the majority of which have not impacted on frontline services.

The majority of respondents (82.5%) thought this was a good strategy.

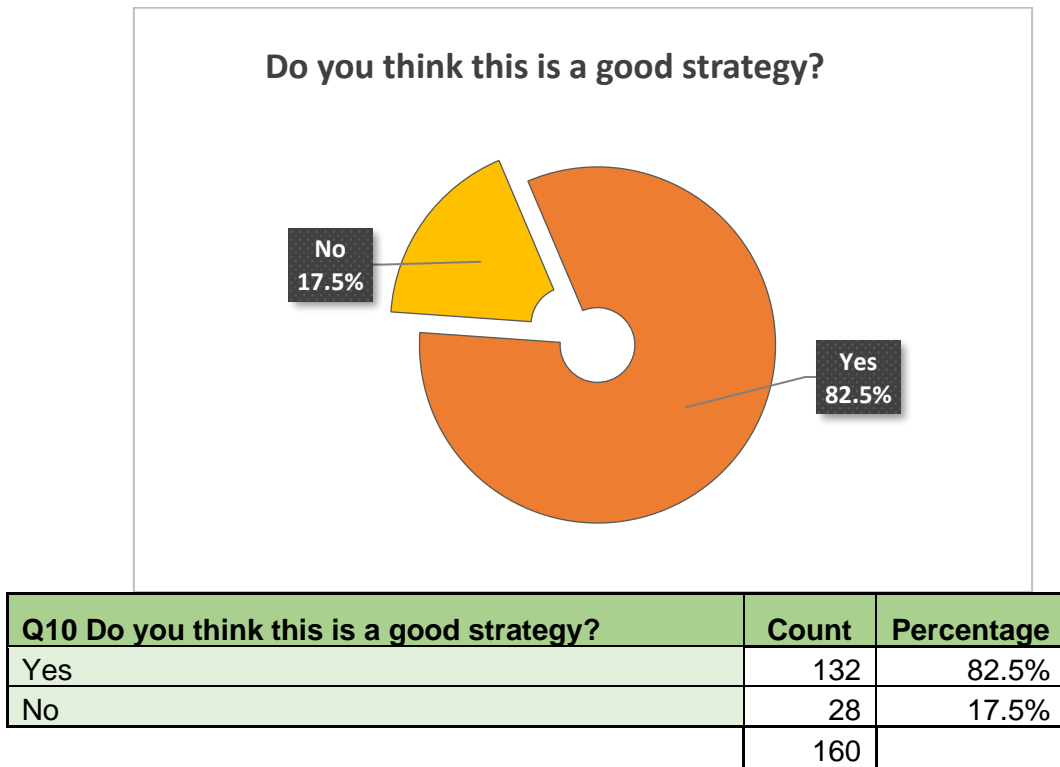


Figure 8 – Efficiency Strategy Agreement

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.

4.18 The common themes in the responses are similar to those sentiments in previous year's feedback. Many respondents advocate for selling or permanently closing underutilised offices and embracing remote work to curtail estate costs. A number of comments mention the need to reduce senior and administrative staff levels, suggesting cuts in their salaries and the overall number of councillors.

There were concerns that the pursuit of efficiencies might inadvertently lead to reductions in service provision, particularly in frontline services. The balance between achieving cost-effectiveness and safeguarding essential services remains a concern amongst some respondents. The themes highlight a persistent call for strategic decision-making that prioritises financial prudence without compromising the quality and accessibility of vital community services.

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.

"Reduce the salaries and expenses of each and every council member."

"Too many office buildings seem like a waste of money – repurpose for affordable housing!"

"efficiency means more than just cutting costs; it's about smarter, flexible working like WFH options."

"Constant drive for efficiencies shouldn't translate to cuts in vital services; focus on the essentials!"

"Sell or close empty offices – why waste resources on buildings not serving the community?"

"Efficiency should be a balance; don't sacrifice frontline services in the pursuit of savings."

"Explore automation possibilities to replace jobs naturally and save on long-term costs."

"Review senior management pay – are the salaries justified in the current financial climate?"

"Strategic decision-making is key – ensure efficiencies enhance services, not diminish them."

Q12 Do you think we should continue to expect our managers (including schools) to deliver more efficient services?	Count	Percentage
Yes	129	81.1%
No	30	18.9%
	159	

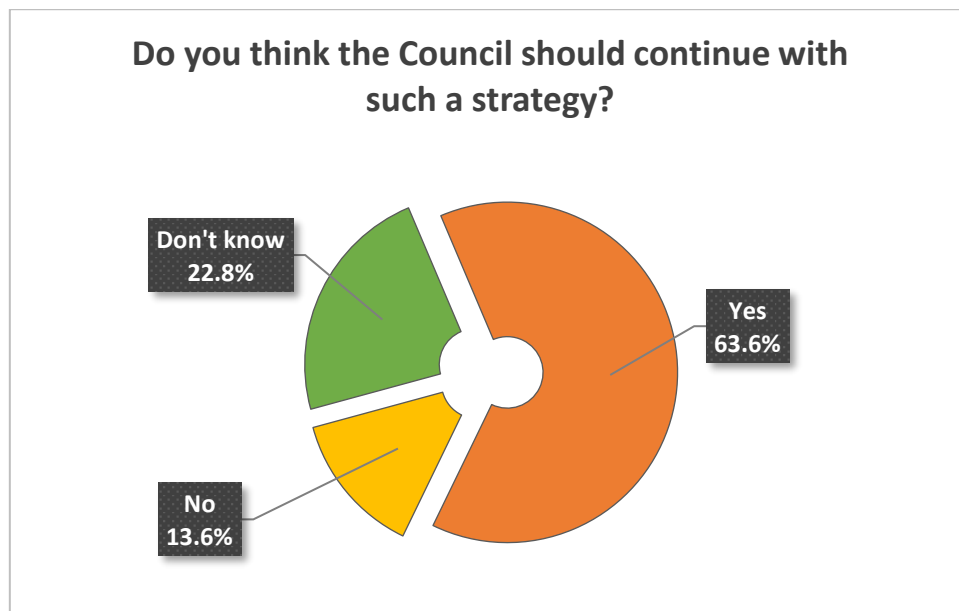
Figure 10 – Manager Efficiency Agreement

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. A significant amount of the Council’s reserves, over 50%, are set aside for the three-year Capital Programme, which funds large investments and projects. The Council’s General Reserve balances at 31st March 2023 amounted to £10.24M. The level of general reserves are kept under on-going review alongside the financial risks the Council faces.

63.6% of respondents agreed that the Council should continue with this strategy.



Q13 Do you think the Council should continue with such a strategy?	Count	Percentage
Yes	103	63.6%
No	22	13.6%
Don't know	37	22.8%
	162	

Figure 11 – Council Reserves Strategy

- 4.22 Respondents were invited to give any general comments they have on the budget.

Some suggested using reserves to help the budget instead of saving them. Similar themes to those mentioned with regards efficiencies were raised, including addressing staffing concerns and worries about potential cuts. Many people highlighted the need for more funding from the UK Government and Welsh Government, and a number of commenters recognised the difficulties of reduced funding from central government and increased costs of providing services.

“Efficiency is not just a goal; it’s a necessity for responsible spending.”

“Sourcing items smartly can lead to significant savings in meeting demands.”

“In a world driven by technology, embracing it is the key to efficiency.”

“Efficiency gains come from integrating technology, ensuring progress.”

“A community’s voice matters; let the public influence budget decisions.”

“Transparent decision-making involves and benefits the entire community.”

“Essential services are the backbone; protect them for a better future.”

“Safeguarding social services ensures positive outcomes for lives.”

“Strategic use of reserves is a wise investment in the council’s future.”

“Reserves act as a safety net, crucial for managing the unforeseen.”

The Council's Priorities

- 4.23 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)*

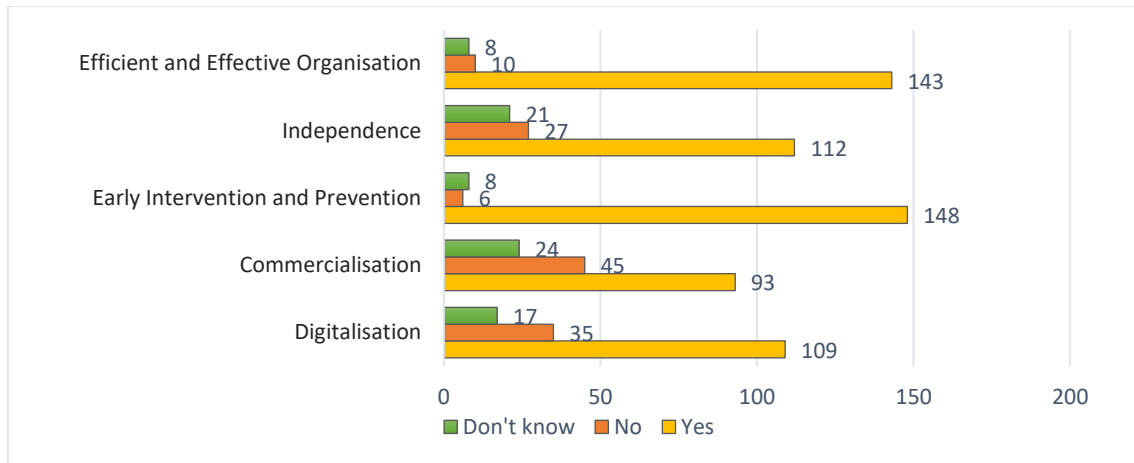
Commercialisation *(utilising our scale and expertise to deliver services for other organisations and customers and thereby generate income)*

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*)

4.24 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 Early Intervention and Prevention (91.4%).

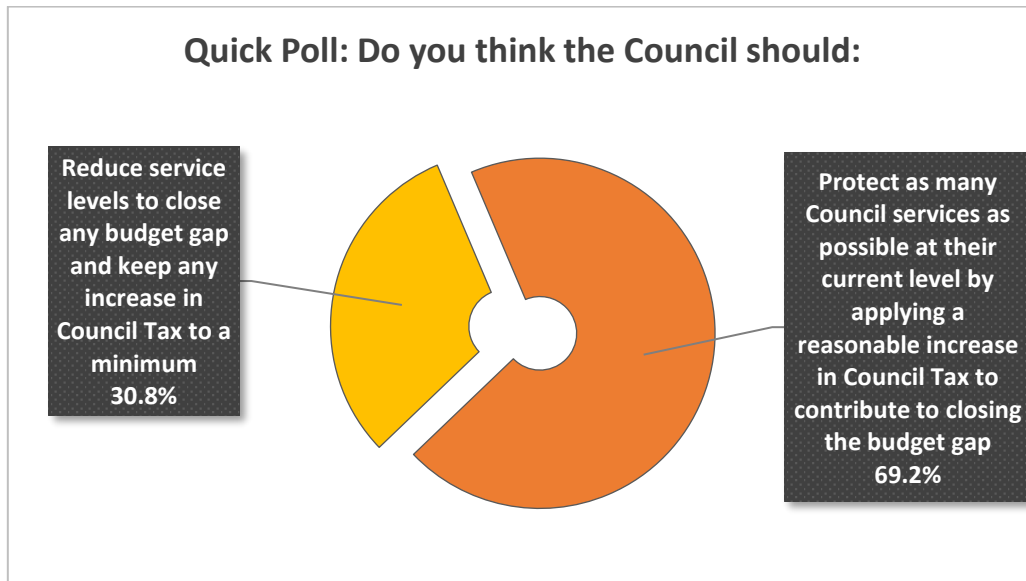


Q15 Do you think the Council should focus on these areas?	Yes	%	No	%	Don't know	%	Total
Digitalisation	109	67.7%	35	21.7%	17	10.6%	161
Commercialisation	93	57.4%	45	27.8%	24	14.8%	162
Early Intervention and Prevention	148	91.4%	6	3.7%	8	4.9%	162
Independence	112	70.0%	27	16.9%	21	13.1%	160
Efficient and Effective Organisation	143	88.8%	10	6.2%	8	5.0%	161

Figure 12 – Council Areas of Focus

Poll Results

- 4.25 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.
- 4.26 Of the 104 responses received, a majority of 69.2% (72) 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.”



Quick Poll	Combined	%
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	72	69.2%
Reduce service levels to close any budget gap and keep any increase in Council Tax to a minimum	32	30.8%
	104	

Figure 13 – Quick Poll 1: Council Tax Increase

About You

- 4.27 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 (67.5%), and 51.8% of respondents stated that they are employees of the Council.

	Count	Percentage
A local resident	112	67.5%
A local business	1	0.6%
An employee of the Council	86	51.8%
A member of a voluntary/community group	8	4.8%
Other	3	1.8%

Figure 14 – Respondent Categories

Note: %'s do not add to 100% as this was a multiple response question.

- 4.28 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. Further comments relating to protected characteristics were also captured under this question and are noted below.

Amongst the replies that did identify a perceived impact, themes were: greater impact on older people and single income families due to reduced or stagnant 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; increased pressure on disabled people due to public transport not being addressed, and due to a return of office working without required support; a reduction in support for LGBTQIA+ communities due to cuts such as the removal of RCT Pride; not enough being done to remove or prevent harassment/ bullying online.

- 4.29 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, many 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, the 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; the potential tourism / cultural boost from greater Welsh language prominence; questions about funding for the National Eisteddfod.

5. Community Conversations

- 5.1 This section outlines the results of the face-to-face engagement with a number of community networks, as well as the 3 public events listed below, which took place at the following locations:

Trailer Event 1:	Pontypridd Town Centre (Mill Street)	22/11/2023
Trailer Event 2:	Tonypany Town Centre (Dunraven Street)	29/11/2023
Trailer Event 3:	Aberdare Town Centre (next to Aberdare Library)	6/12/2023

Overall, 207 people engaged in face-to-face public consultation as part of the phase 1 budget consultation process.

Face to Face Public Events

- 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 Council's budget for 2024/25, and how the Council can be more efficient. Engagement 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 /make savings?*
3. *Do you have any examples of the Council not being efficient?*



Figure 15 – Trailer

- 5.3 Comments received from the public in relation to other areas were also noted down and directed towards the relevant officers to consider.
- 5.4 The comments noted during events were categorised into broader themes, as set out below. The full text of all comments received are available for Cabinet and Officers to view.

Waste and recycling were recurring themes in 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.

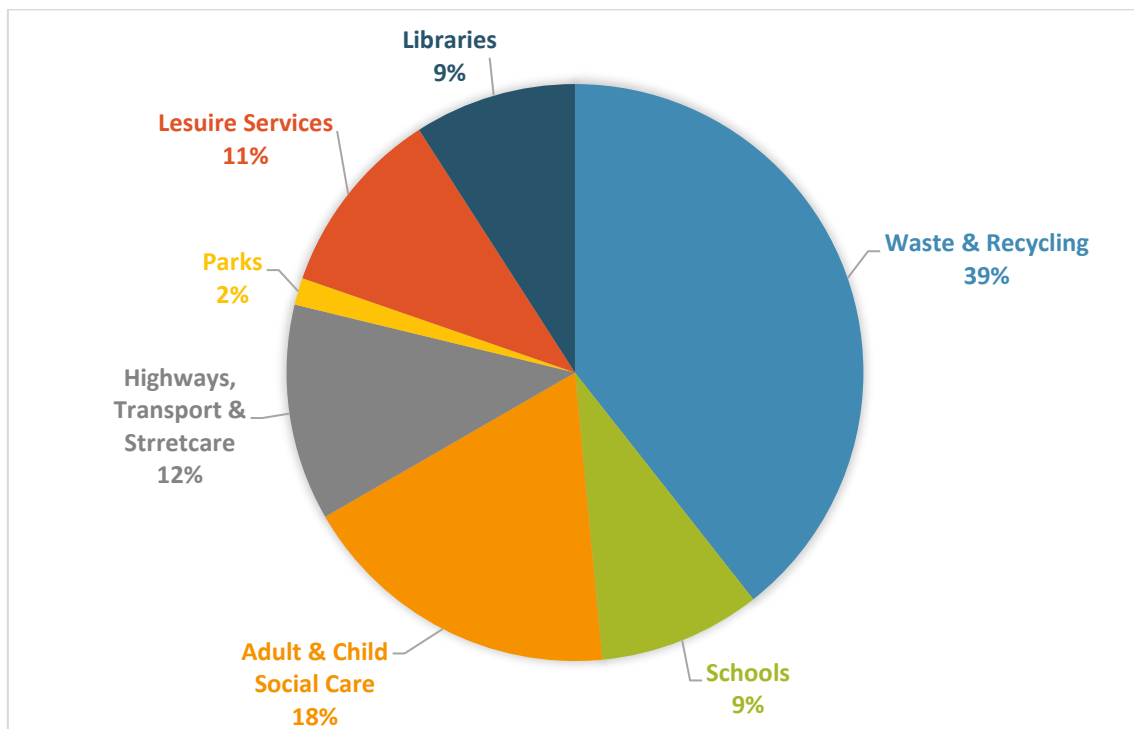


Figure 16 – Comments Received at Face-to-Face Events

Community Forums

- 5.5 A presentation was provided to the Older Persons Advisory Group (OPAG) on 21/11/2023 and the RCT Disability Forum on 14/12/2023. The following section outlines some of the comments and views received at the meetings.

Schools Budget

- 5.6 In terms of the schools budget the majority of the OPAG agreed that the Council should provide additional funding over and above pay cost increases for next year as a contribution to non-pay pressures (inflation, pupil numbers etc).

“Schools have to be protected; they are our future”.

“As a teacher, you can’t do your job without resources”.

“If you focus on maintaining schools, with no money and resources, they have no future.”

“Logically we want younger generations to do well and get good jobs to pay tax and support us”. (Disability Forum member).

Social care budget

- 5.7 The majority of the OPAG and the Disability Forum members agreed that the Council should continue to prioritise the social care budget.

“Elderly population is increasing all the time”.

There were comments and questions as to why the costs were so high and also the need for the same support for Children’s Services.

Fees and charges

- 5.8 The OPAG and the Disability Forum thought that the Council’s approach to individually reviewing fees and charges was reasonable.

“As a council we can increase our fees and charges for select services.”

“A sledgehammer approach it would be to increase all costs across the board”.

Service levels

- 5.9 With regards to service levels and possible reduction in operating hours of some services, there was a concern from OPAG members about the impact it could have on peoples’ jobs.

The Disability Forum suggested paying for services in the libraries.

“Surprised they are free to start with”.

“Review of service frequencies to save money is a good idea”

“Transport is an important service.”

“Accesibilty on transport services is not how it should be”

Council Tax

5.10 With regards to Council tax, second homes were mentioned.

“Are you charging Airbnb lets more?”

“Holiday Lets and boarded up houses”

In terms of whether an increase was acceptable the following comments were made.

“There’s no other option, we have to”

“Haven’t got a choice”

“Would prefer 3%, But we don’t get that choice”

The Disability Forum agreed that Council Tax should stay under 5%

Efficiencies

5.11 In terms of efficiencies, the OPAG agreed with the strategy of all service managers being required to contribute towards a Council wide efficiency target. There were suggestions to increase fines for fly tipping and increase enforcement.

“Fine fly tippers a lot more than we are”

“Camera monitoring sites to catch offenders, Make offenders work”

There were concerns about the Council outsourcing;

“Agencies should be given less work in the council”

“How much are consultants pay”

“Look in-house for people with skills”

Council reserves

5.12 The OPAG and Disability Forum agreed with the Council's approach to how it uses reserves.

Council priorities

- 5.13 The question on Council priorities resulted in a number of comments and questions in relation to adult social care and independent living;

“How successful were you in giving people independence in their own homes”.

“Waiting for social service assessments”.

“Infrastructures to share information are not working effectively – between health board and social service.”

“Preventative care is very good in this council.”

“Look at what people need and not what we think they need”.

“RCT care to reduce dependency on services is very good”.

Overall the OPAG was happy to focus on these priority areas.

6. YOUNG PERSONS ENGAGEMENT

- 6.1 Face-to-face engagement exercises took place at three schools in Rhondda Cynon Taf: Tonyrefail Community School, Aberdare Community School and Treorchy Comprehensive School. Valuable insight was received on students’ opinions regarding the importance of the Council’s services and the School budget for 2024/25.
- 6.2 The sessions were attended by members of the Consultation Team along with a Finance Officer. During the sessions the students were taken through a short presentation with discussion prompts and questions from the full budget consultation.
- 6.3 The questions were centred around Fees and Charges, Council Service Priorities, Efficiencies and the School Budget. The sessions were well supported by their teachers and all students engaged well with the format. A summary of their responses is highlighted below.
- 6.4 **Fees and Charges**

We asked each 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 are money you pay for some services such as Leisure centres, swimming pools, Car park charges and RCT Cinema tickets.
- Fees and Charges provide income which can help the Council to provide important services.
- The Council raises £24M a year from fees and charges to support services.
- We don't think it is right to increase all fees and charges by the same amount. Instead, we think they need to be checked one at a time so we can make sure any extra cost is fair.

Do you think the Council should review each fee or charge by itself to make sure any changes are fair?

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

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

The slide also features icons for a swimmer, a recycling symbol, and a clapperboard, along with the 'HAVE YOUR DWEUD' logo.

Figure 17 - Council Fees and Charges slide

Comments included:

Freeze

“Leisure centres should go down (Llantrisant Leisure Centre user), there should be frozen prices for students.”

“School meals should be frozen; we can leave the school and go elsewhere and if those meals go up we’ll just go elsewhere. School meals are between £2.70 - £2.80.”

“Cheaper in school than outside, not very nice, spending an average of £10/£15 P/W, Freeze prices” (School meals)

“The Park and Dare is a big part of our identity. The prices are fair. Freeze them.”

Increase

“Increase fines for dropping litter to deter people from doing it.”

“Increase daily charge, so more people who go often would invest into monthly and annual costs.” (leisure)

“Increase prices to entertainment services rather than essentials.” (RCT cinemas / theatres)

“If littering was monitored better, people would be deterred if actually getting fined.”

“Should charge more people, entrance fees. Add a price to U16. Free for under 5’s, £2.50 under 16’s?” (Lido)

“Give the lido a cooler name like Pool Mania. Lots of people don’t know the word Lido. Memberships would be a good idea. Increase what is there to make it better and change the name.”

“The Lido is a tourist attraction and as a tourist attraction, it is cheap.” Visitors travel to the Lido from outside – may benefit economically for Pontypridd Town Centre but price is extremely low – more expensive than RCT’s own residents using other council run swimming pools.

Decrease

“Sports club playing fees are too expensive, maybe have reduced rates for young people and students.”

“Advertise our lower rates for younger people – People may be more likely to pay if there’s more affordable option to them.” (leisure)

“I use the Astro turf twice a week. It’s used often on weekdays but not so much on the weekends – drop the prices on the weekends for young people to be available to use them.”

“Introduce lower prices, giving younger people places to go.” (RCT cinemas / theatres)

- 6.5 There was a general agreement across all groups, to increase fines for dropping litter, to deter people from dropping litter in the first place. Various comments highlighted the option to potentially increase / change the fees for the Lido as a way to raise more revenue. The Lido fees were seen as fair but it was seen as a luxury that people could afford to spend more money on, being a tourist attraction (as were RCT Theatres); however the theatres were noted to be somewhere where young people could go to get off the streets and so discussions around theatres also raised comments about decreasing prices for young people.
- 6.6 The students mostly agreed that school meal prices needed to be frozen as any increase to these would be seen as unfair and wouldn't provide value for money. Leisure services was also discussed as something where fees needed to freeze and remain at the current level; however leisure and sports clubs were noted to be important and they also discussed decreasing these fees to encourage take up by young people.

6.7 **Priorities**

We asked the 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 group felt should be a priority for the Council and whether or not changes could be made to these services in order to save money.

Priorities

What council services are most important to you?

Do you think any of these services need to be changed? E.g., changing opening times or changing how often a service is provided?

- Schools
- Adult Social Care Services
- Children's Social Care Services
- School Support Services
- Regeneration of Town Centres
- Waste and Recycling Services
- Roads, Transport and Streetcare Services
- Public Health (Covid-19 / rating takeaways / health & safety)
- Parks and Play Areas
- Leisure Services e.g. Swimming Pools & Gyms
- Cultural, Tourism and Heritage Services
- Libraries and Adult Learning Courses e.g. Languages / IT support
- Youth services
- Housing
- Graduate Scheme, Apprenticeship Scheme
- Tackling Climate change
- Music Service – Access to music lessons / instruments through School

Figure 18 - Priorities presentation slide

- 6.8 The students talked about the services that were important to them.

Comments included:

Music Service

“The music service is important – I play guitar and have vocal lessons.”

“Music services could be charged at a higher price in schools, Not as important as other things so would pay for this service as its cheaper than private.”

“Could pay more for music. Not private prices but more of a contribution – willing to pay more.”

“If you make people pay it’ll get rid of people doing it solely to cut class.”

- 6.9 The students in Aberdare Community School talked about the fact that the waiting lists for music lessons in RTC were really long and lasted for months. It was said, if the lessons are free, it can attract people for the wrong reason not for the love of music. The general feeling was that this is a service that the Council could charge more for. 8 students in the group at Treorchy Comprehensive used the music service.

“Music and performing arts is a big part of our community. It’s very relevant.”

“Schools should focus more on languages. Should keep languages available. Class sizes affected language budget.”

“Music classes have been cut because of the budget.”

“Drama and performing arts have low numbers.”

Leisure services

“I use leisure centres between lessons and after school.”

“The Council should up the price at peak times after school.”

- 6.10 Students in Tonyrefail Community School talked about how the Council could utilise buildings more and combine schools and leisure centres so that the number of buildings were cut down and young people would have access before, during and after school to the gym etc. This would allow young people somewhere to go straight from school.

Graduate Scheme, Apprenticeship Scheme

“Apprenticeships are important as sometimes people don’t want to go to Uni or don’t have the money.”

“Grads and Apprentices are important. They give people good opportunities.”

“Apprenticeships and grads – Offer more of these, may be better option to people who don’t do so well in school environments, learn and get paid. Uni isn’t for everyone.”

Youth Services (YEPS)

“YEPS does a lot and many kids rely on their services, however focus energy on the lower years.”

“Yeps is a really good service, could raise numbers of users with a small fee.”

“YEPS isn’t advertised enough.”

- 6.11 YEPS was seen as an important service to the young people and an asset to the Council, especially by students at Aberdare Community School.

Other

“Childrens’ Social care services are important to me. There needs to be more opportunities for kids as part of social services.”

“Treorchy library has a really good area for young people to hang out in straight from school – it’s a safe area to hang out in.”

“Cultural, Tourism and Heritage – we can’t ignore these things.”

“Keep waste services the same, look at composting.”

“Regeneration of town centres aren’t a priority.”

“Location of Nantgarw 6th form college isn’t ideal. Has it impacted on the number of pupils staying on in 6th form, does distance to travel from top of the valley deter students attending to study subjects that the local 6th forms can no longer offer due to class numbers.”

6.12 **Efficiencies**

As the Council faces a £35 million budget gap, we asked the groups how they thought their schools could be more efficient in saving money. As part of the schools being more efficient and saving money, the students highlighted 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.

Electricity / solar panels

“When we drive past schools in the night, the lights are always on. They should be on sensors.”

“Automatic and timed electronics to save money.”

“A lot of pupils prefer to work in the dark.”

“We do have solar panels,”

“Does the size of the school make a difference? There are loads of blocks.”

“If we had solar panels on all of our block roofs, we’d need investment.”

Other

“It’s hard to make cuts from schools as they are important.”

“Lower budgets are cutting certain recourses.”

“There isn’t money to save.”

“All agree schools should receive more money.”

“Electric vehicles are good for the environment – we’ll all have to use them eventually.”

“Cutting staff is not an option.”

“Is there an expectation of schools recycling like businesses?”

Printing

“Signing in forms waste of time and money with printers and screens.”

“Charges and limits to print, not able to print for classes”.

Unnecessary spending / mis-spent funds

“Spend too much on music services, instruments etc.”

“Less trips for departments.”

“Science money is mis-spent.”

Equipment

“6 Tv’s all just going through a few slides, waste of money when it comes to electricity costs. Maybe these could be used to advertise Council services like YEPS and the Coliseum”.

“Donate stationary to save departments money.”

“There are two tv’s that aren’t used in the Science block that just show the school logo.”

“There’s lots of gymnastics equipment that doesn’t get used because of health and safety.”

“A lot of money is spent on laptops and technology. If we encourage students to look after these things, it would save money.”

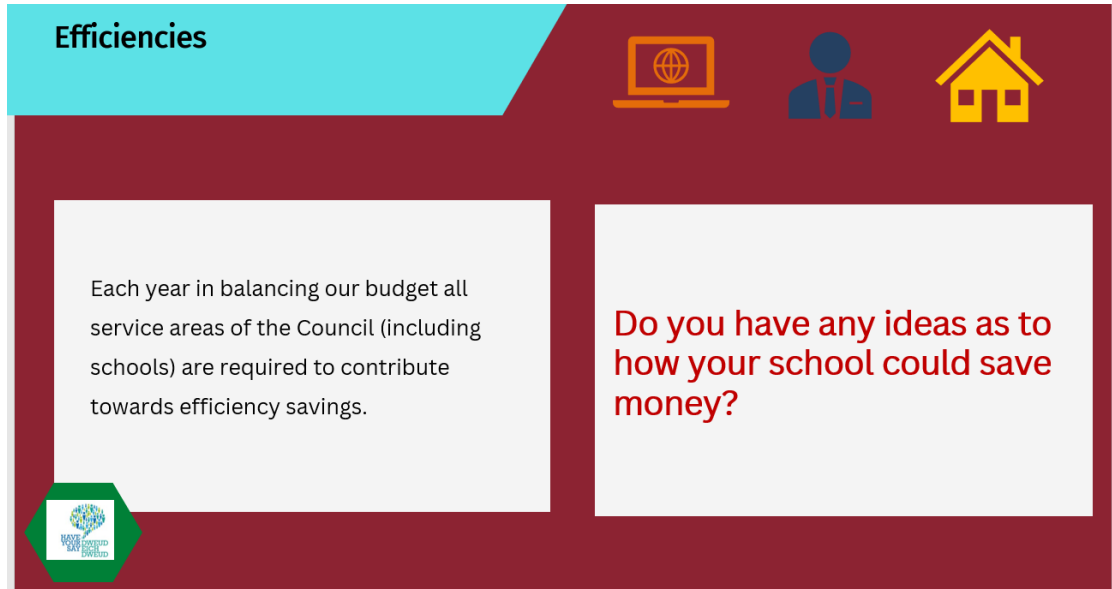


Figure 19 - Efficiencies presentation slide

6.13 School Budget

We asked whether the groups agreed with the Council’s approach to protect and prioritise the schools’ budget; they all agreed that the Council should increase funding for schools to contribute to covering the costs that have gone up.

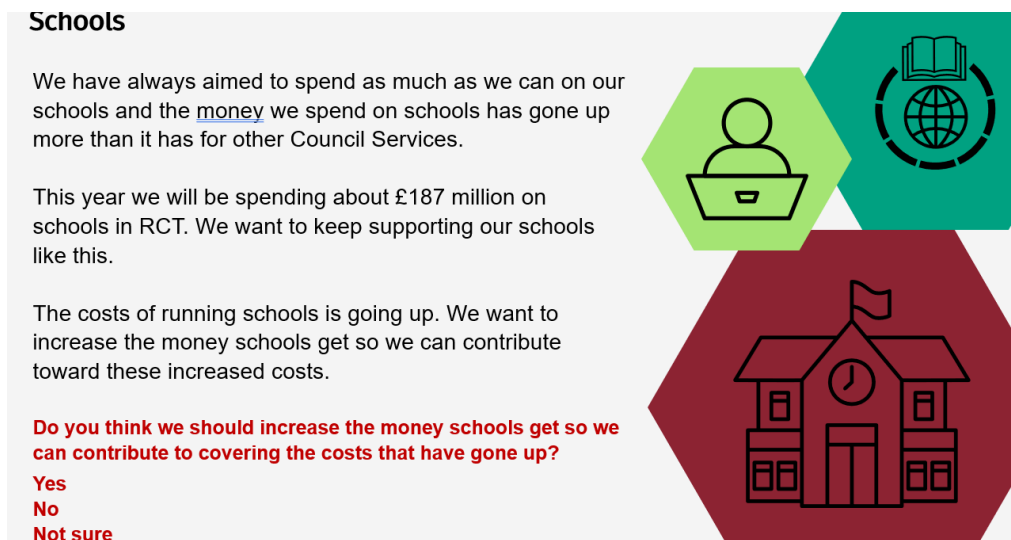


Figure 20 - Schools Budget presentation slide

6.14 The groups were all in agreement to increase money to schools.

Comments included:

“With inflation, the money you get doesn’t cover it so you’d need to spend more.”

“Gas and electricity are some of the biggest contributors to the budget. Should there be a cap?”

“Schools money needs to be used better.”

“Cut down on plastic waste – reduce the use of plastic bottles and get students to bring in refillable bottles instead, although the school would need to provide more water then.”

“We have a community lunch pass that works in partnership with the Co-op. Catering in the school needs investment.”
