

Dewch i
siarad RhCT
Let's talk
RCT

2024/25 BUDGET (PHASE 2)

APPENDIX 2

Consultation Report

Rhondda Cynon Taf CBC

February 2024



RHONDDA CYNON TAF

CONTENTS

<u>Section</u>	Page
Executive Summary	3
Introduction	5
Background	5
Methodology	6
Consultation Findings	7

<u>Figures</u>	Page
1: Council Tax	7
2: Council Tax Quick Poll	8
3: Schools	11
4: Efficiencies	14
5: Fees and Charges	17
6: Use of Reserves	22
7: Respondent Type	25
8: Impact on Welsh Language learners	27
9: Welsh Language	29

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- This section provides a summary of the main findings from the Phase 2 Budget Consultation 2024-25.
- Rhondda Cynon Taf's 2024-25 Budget Consultation is a phased approach, so that we can ensure residents and stakeholders have as much opportunity as possible to provide views on the budget and to make sure that views are informed by the most up to date and relevant information.
- Phase 1 provided residents and stakeholders with the opportunity to feedback their views on some of the key strategic building blocks used to construct the Council's proposed budget. The Phase 1 consultation report was available to support the preparation of the budget strategy proposals and was presented to Cabinet on the 24th January 2024, where a draft budget strategy was agreed.
- This report presents the findings of **Phase 2** of the budget consultation, which asked for views on the draft budget strategy for 2024-25. Phase 2 of the consultation started on the 24th January 2024 and ended on the 9th February 2024.
- The Council is proposing that Council Tax be increased by 4.9% for next year, likely to be one of the lowest increases in Wales. 58.3% of respondents felt that the increase was not reasonable compared to 37.0% who fed back the proposed increase was reasonable.
- The main reasons provided by respondents who disagreed with the proposed increase in Council Tax were the ongoing Cost of Living crisis including stagnating wages against increased outgoings and dissatisfaction with service levels (and concerns about proposed/future service reductions).
- The respondents who thought that the proposed increase in Council Tax was reasonable that they believe the current financial situation requires additional Council Tax income to maintain services.
- A Quick Poll question about Council Tax was phrased differently to that in the survey, asking whether respondents agreed "with a 1% increase in Council Tax to that originally planned, from 3.9% to 4.9%". Results from this survey contradict those from the survey findings, with 67.2% agreement and 29.4% disagreement.
- The Schools Budget next year is once again being prioritised and will contribute a far lower efficiency saving than other Council Services. It is proposed to increase the Schools Budget by £11.9 million, an increase of 6.4% compared to the 2.8% increase in funding the Council is to receive from Welsh Government, as per the provisional local government settlement. 62.8% of respondents agreed with the approach to continue to

prioritise our schools and the proposed increase to the Schools budget for 2024-25.

- Significant work has been undertaken across all Council Services and budget reduction measures totalling £13 million for 2024-25 have been identified which can be delivered without significantly impacting on our front-line services. 72.9% of respondents agreed that the Council should continue to maximise efficiency and pursue these efficiency savings for next year.
- 67.5% of respondents agreed with the proposals for fees and charges.
- 75.6% of respondents agreed with the proposed approach for the use of the Council's reserves.
- 686 people were engaged in the phase 2 budget consultation. Overall (including Phase 1) over 1,200 people were engaged in the Council's 2-phase budget consultation process.

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This report presents the findings of the Phase 2 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 of the Let's Talk engagement tools and the feedback received from the Older Persons Advisory Group (OPAG).
- 1.5 Section 5 provides feedback on the young persons' engagement.

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 recommend a Revenue Budget Strategy for the 2024-25 financial year.
- 2.3 Rhondda Cynon Taf's 2024-25 Budget Consultation is a phased approach, so that we can ensure residents and stakeholders have as much opportunity as possible to provide views on the budget and to make sure that views are informed by the most up to date and relevant information.
- 2.4 Phase 1 provided residents and stakeholders with the opportunity to feedback their views on some of the key elements used to construct the Council's proposed budget.
- 2.5 The Phase 1 [consultation report](#) was available to support the preparation of the budget strategy proposals and was presented to [Cabinet on the 24th January 2024](#), where a draft budget strategy was agreed.
- 2.6 This report presents the findings of **phase 2** of the budget consultation, which asked for views on the draft budget strategy for 2024-25.
- 2.7 Phase 2 of the consultation started on the 24th January 2024 and ended on the 9th February 2024.

3. METHODOLOGY

- 3.1 This section provides a summary of the methodology used for the Phase 2 Budget Consultation 2024-25. The consultation was conducted in-house.
- 3.2 The consultation period ran from the 24th January 2024 and ended on the 9th February 2024.
- 3.3 The approach included the following methods to consult with a range of stakeholders:
 - Publication of information on the Rhondda Cynon Taf [“Let’s Talk”](#) website, which included
 - A survey
 - “Quick Poll”
 - A simplified “Easy Read” document that could be downloaded and printed for use by any audiences that felt unable to engage with the full survey format.
 - Key background documents
 - Promotion through social media
 - A face-to-face meeting with the OPAG
 - Overview & Scrutiny Committee meeting
 - School Budget Forum meeting
 - Joint Consultative Committee meeting
 - A face-to-face session with young people and engagement through Tonyrefail Community School and Treorchy Comprehensive School
 - An email sent to key stakeholders.
- 3.4 The Council provided a number of alternatives to online engagement, as it is important to continue to consider hard to reach groups, those having reduced or no access to the internet and those who prefer to engage through traditional methods. A telephone consultation option was also in place, through the Council’s contact centre. This option allows people to discuss their views or request consultation materials. Individual call backs were available on request and a consultation Freepost address was available for postal responses.
- 3.5 The Team designed an Easy Read/Plain English Document in paper format and online, to simplify some of the consultation materials.
- 3.6 686 people were engaged in the phase 2 budget consultation. Overall (including Phase 1) over 1,200 people were engaged in the Council’s 2-phase budget consultation process.

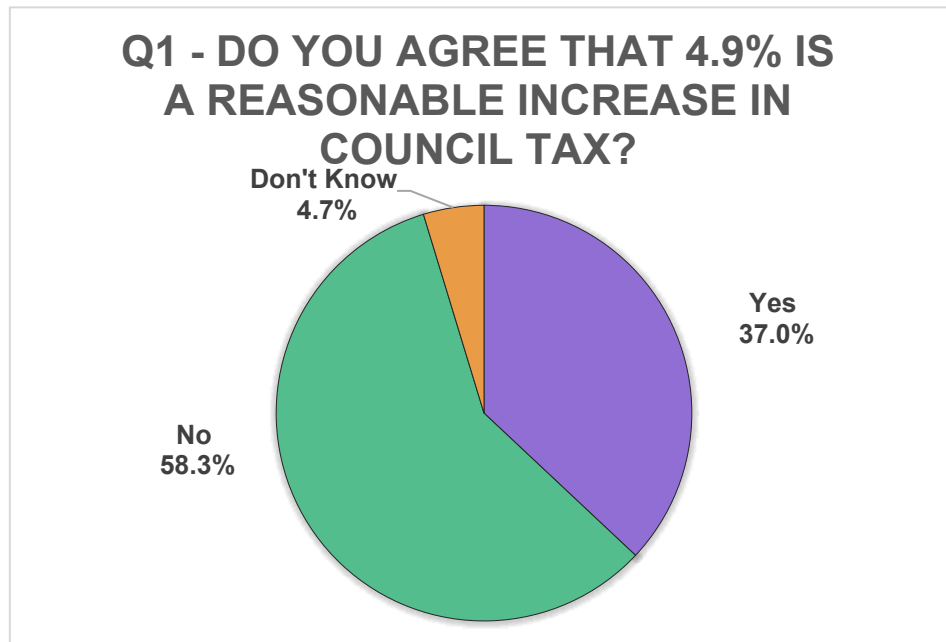
4. Consultation Findings

4.1 The following section outlines the results from the phase 2 budget consultation questionnaire, which received 450 responses, and also includes the feedback received from the OPAG and the young people in schools.

A selection of comments are provided, and the full list of comments will be provided to Cabinet and senior officers to assist with decision making.

Council Tax

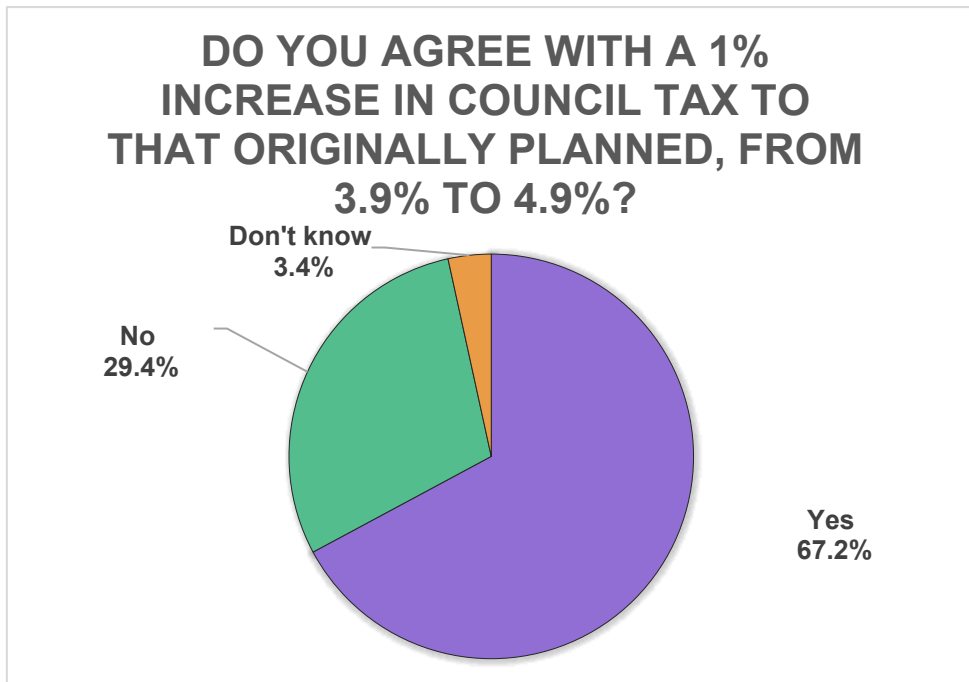
4.2 The Council is proposing that Council Tax be increased by 4.9% for next year. The majority of respondents to the questionnaire felt that the increase was **not** reasonable (58.3%).



	Number	%
Q1 - Do you agree that 4.9% is a reasonable increase in Council Tax?	Yes	165 37.0%
	No	260 58.3%
	Don't know	21 4.7%
	Total	446

Figure 1 – Council Tax

4.3 The Poll question on the Let's Talk Budget Engagement site was completed by 204 people, with 67.2% agreeing and 29.4% disagreeing to this level of Council Tax increase. It should be noted that the wording of the poll question was different to that in the main survey, where respondents were asked if they agreed with a 1% increase in Council Tax to that originally planned, from 3.9% to 4.9%.



Quick Poll: Do you agree with a 1% increase in Council Tax to that originally planned, from 3.9% to 4.9%?	Number	%
Yes	137	67.2%
No	60	29.4%
Don't know	7	3.4%
	204	

Figure 2 – Council Tax Quick Poll

4.4 A large number of comments disagreed with an increase in Council Tax and the comments can be placed under a number of themes, as follows:

Cost of Living

4.5 The main reason cited for disagreement with the suggested increase in Council Tax was the current cost of living crisis and that people were finding it difficult financially, with the increasing price of food, energy etc.

"With everything else going up, it's hard enough as it is to manage without increasing more bills."

"An increase would put more pressure on working families."

"Most peoples pay hasn't gone up by that much"

"People are struggling now, an increase would put more pressure on already stretched households."

"Our monthly income is leaving us with nothing else to spare as it is, we are struggling to pay our mortgage, heating, and food. Our council tax is

already a bill that we struggle to keep on top of and it's increasing every year."

"With RCT being one of the poorest regions in wales and the uk and with a cost of living crisis and low wages in the valleys with many people spending high fuel costs to travel to work this is totally unacceptable"

"It's too much for struggling households to cope with on top of other financial pressures."

The young people we spoke to in schools felt that the increase in Council Tax was unfair:

"Alongside all the other costs, that is a lot."

"I think it's unfair, everything's going up, there's not enough money to live on."

Dissatisfaction with Service Quality

- 4.6 There was a level of dissatisfaction with the services received for the Council tax that is paid.

"Services are being cut - yet we are expected to pay more."

"Council tax is expensive and despite receiving a discount for a single occupancy it is already extremely high with council services not being delivered well."

"Ridiculous. Cuts to save money by dropping bin collections to 3 weekly and now increasing council tax feels insulting and takes no regard to the residents of RCT."

"The roads are still in a state. Potholes everywhere, street lighting knocked off, the list goes on."

"Services have been reduced! So why do we have to pay more?"

"If things were kept at current levels then yes but we all know services are being cut"

Support the increase

- 4.7 Some of the respondents were supportive of the increase in Council tax;

"The rise should be higher so as to prevent cuts to our public services, which will prove inevitable without a much higher rise in tax."

"Another year that RCT has managed to maintain a relatively low increase."

“As stated this increase could be one of the lowest in Wales... There being no other option !!!!”

“Given the hole RCT is in I agree that a 4.9% increase this year is necessary and could be considered reasonable however I also feel that the council needs to look into efficiency improvements throughout its organisation.”

“I believe it’s necessary but not reasonable “

“I don’t think any rise in Council Tax is reasonable, however, with the budget problems a 4.9% raise is acceptable.”

“It is quite a jump, but due to current situation may be only option.”

“its a lot to put on tax payers but if its the only way to keep hold of our public services then it has to be done”

“Raise it a little more”

“This is very reasonable in comparison to neighbouring authorities proposals”

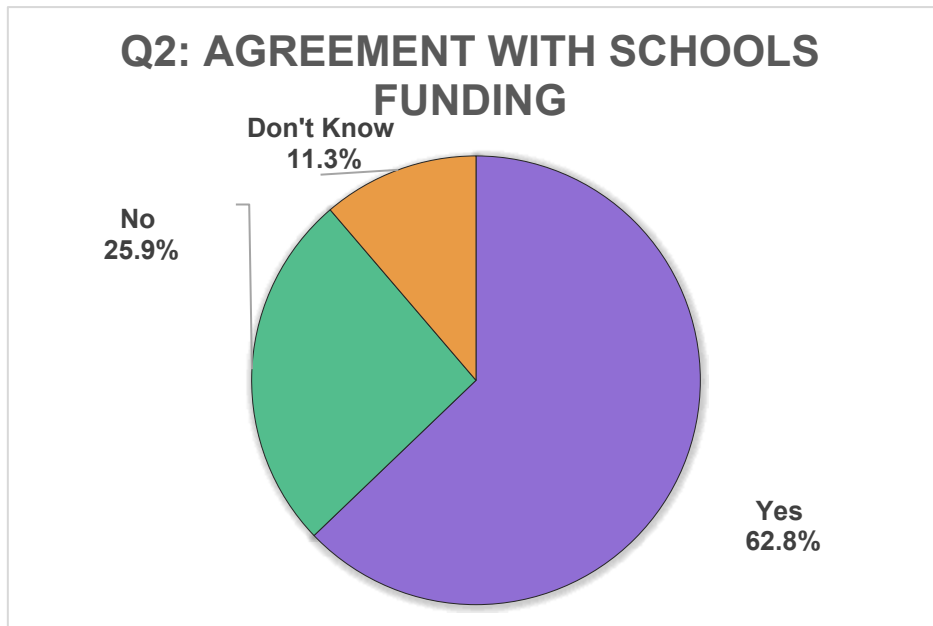
- 4.8 OPAG members accepted that the increase was necessary given the financial situation the Council is in.

Schools Funding

- 4.9 The Schools Budget next year is once again being prioritised and will have to contribute a lower efficiency saving than other Council Services.

It is proposed to increase the Schools Budget by £11.9 million, an increase of 6.4% as compared to the 2.8% increase in funding the Council is to receive from Welsh Government, as per the provisional local government settlement.

62.8% of respondents agreed with the approach and the proposed increase to the Schools budget for 2024-25.



		Number	%
Q2 - Schools	Yes	279	62.8%
	No	115	25.9%
	Don't know	50	11.3%
	Total	444	

Figure 3 – Schools

4.10 The majority of comments welcomed the approach for funding schools.

Support for additional funding:

"Children are the future so must have a good education."

"Schools are important and our children need safe and secure places to be educated."

"Children are our future, & as an overall 'deprived area', schools & children need as much support as possible."

"Schools need to be prioritized to give children the best possible chance."

"Schools need more support as they are fighting a losing battle regarding behavior and the ALN children."

"you cannot sacrifice the opportunity for a child to have the chance of a good education and future job/carer prospects"

All of the young people we spoke to agreed with the additional funding for schools.

- 4.11 Many comments were received that supported an increase in the school budget, however some respondents felt that the increase should be in line with the proposed Council Tax increase (4.9%) or the provisional settlement figure from Welsh Government (2.8%).

Lower school budget increase

“4.9% should be allocated”

“School budgets increases should be lower to recognise that other services e.g. should also be protected. Schools should not expect to be protected year on year and should share the pain of reduced budgets.”

“I agree that schools budget should be protected but not to the detriment of other services, which by giving a 6.4 % increase will inevitably happen”

“If Welsh Government is increasing by 2.8% that is all it should be increased by. If you just manage and subsidise, then you will never get a fair settlement from WAG. Robbing Peter to Pay Paul isn't a good strategy.....”

- 4.12 A number of comments received were in favour of a budget increase for schools, but wanted more information on how the money would be invested.

Other ideas

“Again, more understanding of why the budget needs increasing by this amount and further to this how exactly will the funds be used.”

“Depends on how the money is going to be used”

“Depends on what the increase will be spent on. I would rather see school transport still being provided and ensuring children are attending school especially the most vulnerable instead of for example providing stationary/books”

“Education of children is important to ensure a bright future for the county but this must not come at a significant cost to parents and taxpayers. Having good education is pointless if the families of those pupils are in poverty.”

“Needs to be specific investment with clear and measurable outputs”

“Schools aren't the only services you provide.”

- 4.13 Some respondents felt that they couldn't comment on the schools budget due to them not having children and so were not affected, however

others felt it was unfair for them to contribute to the budget because they had no use for schools.

Not applicable - not directly affected

“Consistent increases in council tax to fund consistent increases in school budget is unfair for residents who have no use for the schools service. I agree that paying for essential schools budget is necessary but not if this is to help fund school services which are non essential”

“Doesn't apply to me, have no children”

“I don't have children so this would be unfair for me to judge”

- 4.14 There were some concerns about increasing schools budget at the expense of other services and the need for schools to also look at efficiencies themselves.

School efficiencies

“Schools should be tasked to look at their own budgets & make efficiencies where possible.”

“Schools have been protected for many years. It's time to carry out a review of service provision to see if there are potential savings.”

“A blanket increase may not be the right approach if schools are individually mis-managing budgets. If the fiscal governance of schools is tight, and every effort is made for correct management, then yes, a budget increase in line with inflation is appropriate.”

“Although there is an increase, schools are also being asked to make a 1.3% “efficiency saving” (essentially a cut)! I feel this should be accurately reported and mentioned alongside the proposed increase. Additionally, many of the schools' traded services costs are being hugely increased. Just saying the budget going up doesn't give a true reflection of the dire picture schools are facing.”

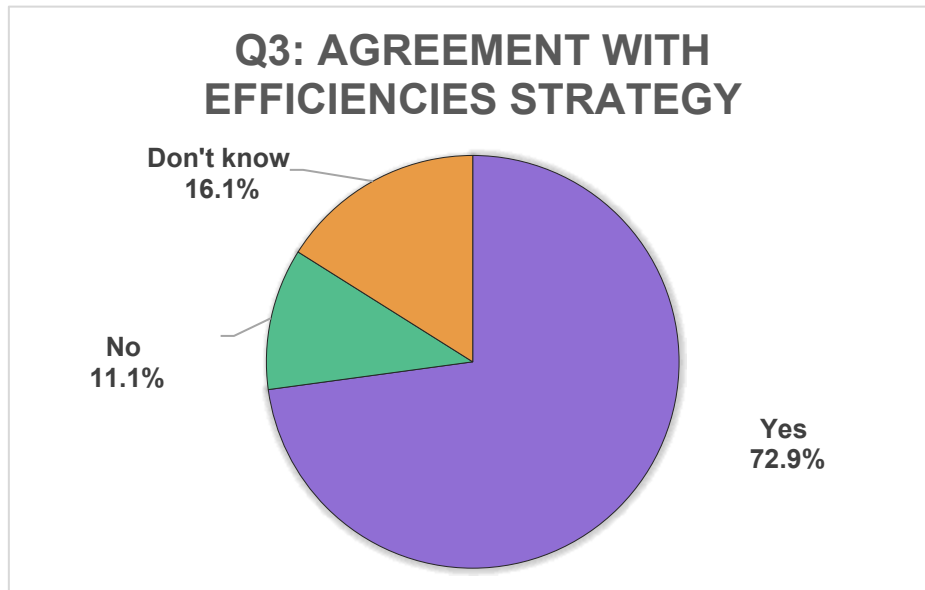
“I know people who work in schools and so much money is wasted. Instead of increasing by that much I feel like budgets should be managed in a much more appropriate way.”

- 4.15 The OPAG agreed with the approach outlined for the schools budget.

Efficiencies

- 4.16 Significant work has been undertaken across all Council Services and budget reduction measures totalling £13 million for 2024-25 have been identified which can be delivered without significantly impacting on our front-line services.

72.9% of respondents agreed that the Council should continue to maximise efficiency and pursue these efficiency savings for next year.



		Number	%
Q3 - Efficiencies	Yes	322	72.9%
	No	49	11.1%
	Don't know	71	16.1%
	Total	442	

Figure 4 – Efficiencies

4.17 Many of the responses were in agreement with the need for efficiencies:

"Yes, I agree to efficiencies, but what does 'without significantly impacting' actually mean?"

"Funds have to be used efficiently so yes, we all have to do our bit but it's hard to watch the quality of life deteriorate in the area."

"Maximizing efficiency! Yes, get on with it....."

Staffing and Efficiency:

4.18 Some of the comments on this proposal noted that efficiencies should not be found at the expense of staffing levels or support to frontline services.

"Your idea of efficiency seems to be cutting staff."

"Frontline services are negatively impacted by every single unfilled vacancy and overworked staff member."

"Efficiency is important but this must not come at the detriment of services or council employees."

- 4.19 A number of suggestions for efficiencies and savings were made in the comments, including:

"Make WFH more accessible managed during the pandemic why not now? If productivity is a concern managers need to be stronger."

"You need to listen to and engage with the staff on the ground in relation to the efficiencies that are achievable while providing the service required."

"Stop wasting money on street speed limit signs and remote funding for Welsh language, all very nice to have in a world where funding is there."

"Stop cutting grass it is not good for biodiversity."

"An easy way to save money is a strict work from home policy."

"Stop the unnecessary office moves and relocations. Stop leasing property when we have Council owned property laying empty."

"Savings should be made where possible, however, money should be spent where the public safety is at risk."

"If you're maximizing efficiencies and you've found savings why can these not be used instead of increasing council tax and increasing schooling budget."

"As long as efficiency doesn't come at a cost to safeguarding children such as school transport and social services provision."

Some comments from our school consultation included:

"Road works – spending money on roads that don't need to be fixed."

"20 mph areas are a waste of money to change signs only to change them back to 30mph."

"Lots of cars speeding in my street and nothing stops them. More cameras are needed or speed bumps in areas where needed."

- 4.20 A number of comments called for cuts to managers and Councillors:

"You need to take away from the top first, too many chiefs."

"Cut the number of highly paid members of management."

Fees and Charges

- 4.21 The Council reviews the level of fees and charges on an annual basis in the context of the rate of inflation. The current level of inflation (Consumer Prices Index to December 2023) is 4.0%, however it has been well above 5% for the majority of the past 12 months.

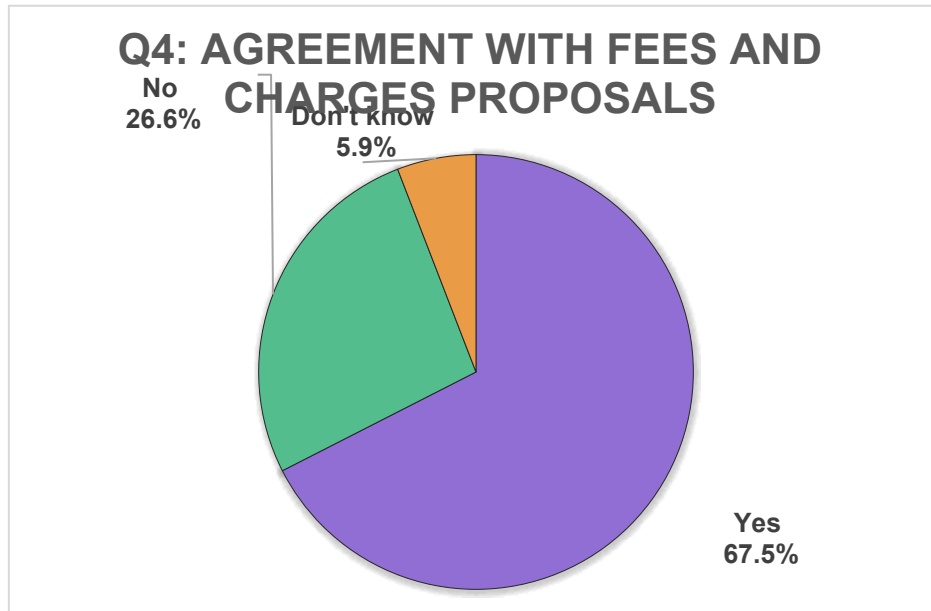
Phase 1 of the Council's 2024/25 Budget Consultation process set out that an across-the-board increase for all fees and charges is not considered reasonable, with the need for fees and charges to be reviewed individually having regard to service user impact.

It is proposed that for the year ahead, the general rate of increase across our fees and charges is set at 5% with the Council absorbing the implications of not applying an uplift in line with inflation. A number of areas are proposed to be subject to specific changes, as shown in the table below:

Area of Charge	Proposed Specific Changes
Car Park Charges	Season tickets/residential parking permits – Freeze Short stay/long stay up to 4 hours £0.10 increase and a £0.20 increase over 4 hours With the additional income generated used to off-set increased transaction costs incurred by the Council where card payments are made to purchase car park tickets*
School Meals (Secondary Schools)	£0.15 per meal
Leisure for Life – Membership / Pay and Play	Membership +£0.50 (with further proposals set out in the full Fees and Charges Review)
Rhondda Heritage Park	£9.95 to £10.95 Adult Entry (with further proposals set out in the full Fees and Charges Review)
Lido (Pontypridd)	Standard admission charge / cold water swim / paid activities - freeze Children under 16 – remain free Boxing day swim: +£0.50 Introduction of a £0.25 booking fee per individual ticket purchased to help reduce the number of pre-bookings that do not result in attendance
Community Meals (meals on wheels) & Day Services meals	Increase of £0.25
Non-residential care services	Home care Hourly Rate: £20.00 to £21.00 per hour Day Centre Services daily rate: from £20.00 to £21.00 per day Direct Payment hourly rate: £10.00 to £11.00 p hour
Bulky Waste Collection	From £17.00 to £20 (for 3 items)

* Car Park Charges – tickets machines being upgraded to enable card payments to be taken (payment by cash option to also remain in place)

4.22 All of these changes would generate additional income of £407k per year. 67.5% of respondents agreed with the proposals for fees and charges.



		Number	%
Q4 - Fees and Charges	Yes	299	67.5%
	No	118	26.6%
	Don't know	26	5.9%
	Total	443	

Figure 5 – Fees and Charges

4.23 Overall there were a wide range of comments on all the areas of fees and charges proposals, based on services used and people’s understanding of each of the services.

There was some general agreement with the overall approach:

General agreement

“I agree with all the proposed fee changes, although Car Park chargers should increase by 20p and 30p (not 10p and 20p). Lido fees should also increase by more than the proposed amount.”

“Absolutely. These are sensible increases that won’t impact too heavily”

“I believe some of these charges could be increased a little more considering past years increases compared to inflation rates.”

“If these are being used then the user's should have to pay the increase”

“on the whole I agree these are good services and the cost is acceptable”

“One or two points could be argued however in the main I'd support the increases as a whole.”

“Seems a reasonable approach in the circumstances”

- 4.24 Generally speaking, the majority of comments received were not in favour of the proposed increases to fees and charges, and there was concern for the local economy and businesses;

Disagreement

“Increases in fees could negatively impact the local economy and small businesses.”

“Stop raising prices and giving us nothing in return!”

“Without transparency of how the funds are saved, it feels like an inflationary hit without any benefit.”

“Disagree with any increases along with my council tax increase. We need more given back, not extra charges.”

“I am unsure what to make of this. The increasing prices more and more in a cost of living crisis is set to take advantage of people that are majorly affected by these increases (usually low/no income households)”

“People are already putting themselves in debt to deal with the increases we are facing year after year”

- 4.25 There were also concerns that some of the increases could have an impact on potentially vulnerable residents, particularly with regards to meal provision;

Impact on Vulnerable Populations:

“Meals young and old increasing, vulnerable people will skip meals.”

“No increase on care or meals on wheels as people who use these services already struggling.”

“These are hitting the most vulnerable in society.”

“The cost for non residential day services is too expensive. People will be excluded and become more isolated.”

“The main one I do not agree with is the increase to the residential services and meals on wheels. Again focused on the lowest earners.”

Maybe place some fees on landlord portfolio owners, 2nd 3rd 4th homes instead. Those who can afford it. Not Mrs Jones on a state pension caring for her husband struggling to heat her home."

"All except care charges. These are not fair in anyway. These are our most vulnerable people and the charge is more than most can afford"

"Some yes and some no comprehensive school meals are already expensive."

A respondent from our school consultation commented *"I don't like the day centre increases."*

- 4.26 The following areas received the most comments on fees and charges and a selection of those comments are provided.
- 4.27 The Lido was seen as an area where prices could be increased due to the service being seen as a luxury.

Lido Charge

"Lido prices should be increased."

"Lido should not be free unless family is on low income, many can afford to pay £3 per swim or £10 family of 4 pass - and if on free school means can go in free and keep a register. That way you'll encourage more families to apply for Free School Meals as many dont."

"Increase Lido booking fee"

"Pre-booking fee on the lido should be much higher. Demand far outstrips supply and as the rates are so low, people make several bookings and do not think about others if they simply fail to use their allocated slot."

"Children are free to the lido which although very nice and may encourage exercise is a luxury not a necessity."

- 4.28 Parking had a mixture of comments with some respondents suggesting it was cheap and charges could potentially be increased, whereas others expressed the opposite opinion;

Parking

"Parking is so cheap I would rather increase that than school meals or meals o. Wheels the the elderly and children it seems disproportionate"

"Charging for parking is killing the town centres."

"Upgrade to parking machines will be very welcomed."

"It is unfair for residents who don't own a vehicle to cushion this."

"Councils wonder why town centres are dead, increasing parking charges only facilitates this. There aren't enough chain shops in towns to want to pay for parking when you can go to a retail park with no parking charges and do much more shopping than in a town centre. Also switching to card payments only is alienating a generation who pay cash. We are not a cashless society and we should not be forced into this."

"I believe that car parking could be increased."

"I do feel that parking charges could be increased more than this though."

"I think all public car parks in RCT should be free for the first 4 hours to encourage footfall in town centres"

- 4.29 The general opinion on school meals was for them to stay as they currently are, with no increase. They were mostly seen as a necessity and not a luxury.

School meals

"School meal prices should increase by up to 50p."

"Increase in school meals by 20p"

"School meal cost should be supplemented to ensure every child gets a hot meal."

"What justifies the increase in school dinner costs? The standard of the food is not getting better but yet you want to charge more. Also, the portions in a secondary school are not always satisfactory for an almost adult for lunch."

"School meals are not a luxury they are necessity, the small ones who don't cost as much to feed are free whereas the teens are not."

- 4.30 The young people we consulted disagreed with the proposals to increase the prices of school meals.

"£2.95 increasing to £3.10... my friend can only buy one item with her allowance. If you have something for breakfast, you don't have enough for lunch. The pizza slices are too expensive."

"When I was in year 7, drinks were cheaper. Cans were 70p and now they're £1+."

"Lunch is sometimes the only hot meal some young people have in the day."

- 4.31 There was concern that there was the potential for increased fly tipping with the proposal to increase the bulky waste charges.

Bulky Waste

"Charging for bulky waste collection has caused so much fly tipping."

"The increase in bulky waste collection will lead to more fly tipping."

"Charging for bulky waste collection prices are extortionate."

"Don't agree - Bulky Waste Collection, Non-residential care services; School Meals (Secondary Schools)."

A young person commented *"Bulky waste increase isn't fair."*

- 4.32 With gym membership, the majority of comments received suggested that exercise benefitted a lot of people and was important for mental health therefore should not be increased.

"fitness activity's going up could result with more pressure o NHS budgets if people stop keeping fit."

"Leisure for life should not be increased as it may deter people from using facilities which benefit their health."

"I go to Llantrisant Gym and the prices are already so high, it needs to be lowered. The general demographic earns less than Cardiff and the Vale and yet our gyms are much higher in price."

"Why will the lido fees remain frozen and hun membership increase when teenagers and younger people are more interested and invested in going to the gym rather than swimming....long term will have a positive impact ie less people using nhs ect"

- 4.33 Some comments were received in relation to the Heritage park;

"Consider reduced charges for OAP and the Disabled at the Rhondda HERITAGE PARK."

"Some suggestions here are totally fine however I believe the impact of increasing prices through psychological price barriers may impact takings negatively. Eg. A couple last year could go to the heritage park with a £20 note, now they can't, they could go somewhere else for roughly the same cost."

“educational places like the heritage park going up? where is the incentive for family's to take their children and educate them on our past history of wales.”

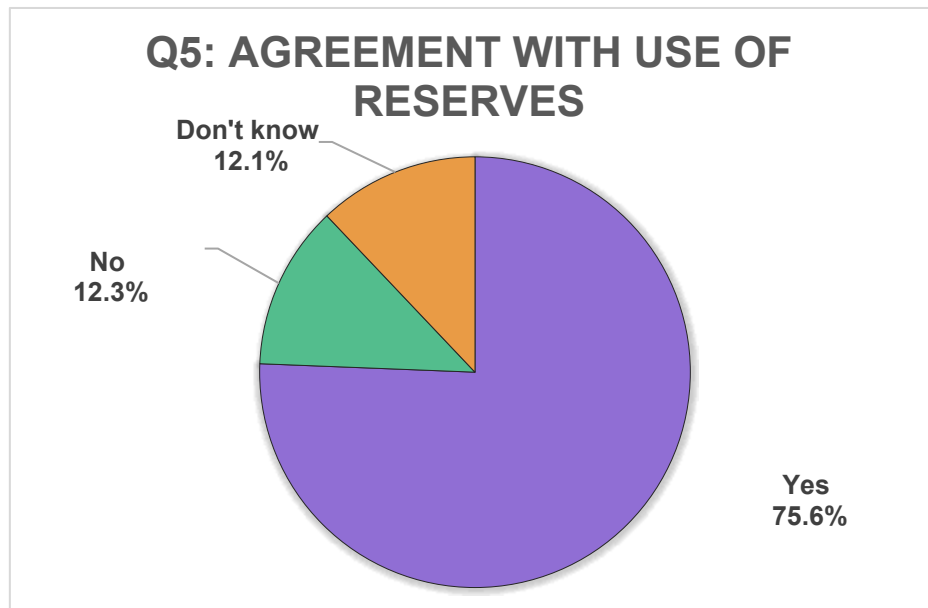
- 4.34 The OPAG noted increases in fees and charges are expected and were generally happy with the rises if they kept Council Tax levels down. They did feel that the £0.25 booking fee for Lido tickets was too low and unlikely to address people booking and not turning up. All members felt it should be higher.

Use of Reserves (Transition Funding)

- 4.35 We have for many years used our reserves (transition funding) sensibly as part of our balanced budget strategy, at a level which does not compromise the robustness of our budget and which can be replenished with some certainty, given our ongoing strategy of delivering savings early.

The Council is proposing to use £8.95 million of reserves (transition funding) to balance the budget for next year.

75.6% of respondents agreed with the proposal to use the Council’s reserves in this way.



		Number	%
Q5 - Use of Reserves	Yes	332	75.6%
	No	54	12.3%
	Don't know	53	12.1%
	Total	439	

Figure 6 – Use of Reserves

- 4.36 A number of respondents were happy with the proposed use of reserves and the way the Council manages them;

“Again RCT has effectively used reserves over a number of years”

“as long as it doesn’t compromise the stability of the council”

“income is never guaranteed so would not use as this cushion only as emergency for risk/health and safety”

“Effective use of reserves is to be encouraged, as long as there is enough held back to cover emergencies such as fire and flooding.”

“It is important that the council looks to use reserves before asking taxpayers to contribute towards higher council tax but less services.”

- 4.37 There was some confusion about the levels of reserves held by the Council and more information was needed by some.

“cannot make an informed response based on the information provided”

“This is too vague, what percentage of the reserves is £8.95m? How quickly can it be replenished.....”

“. . . there is no right answer to this question. We would also need to understand the impact of using it or not.”

- 4.38 The OPAG commented on the importance of reserves within the Council and agreed with the proposed use of the Council reserves as outlined.

Other Comments

- 4.39 A wide range of general comments were received regarding the budget. Some of the most frequent themes are described below, with relevant quotes.

Appreciation of the current financial situation

“Only that I appreciate how difficult it must be for RCT to juggle things about considering the short fall from Govt.”

“Think I have covered it all. I know have criticised but I also appreciate how difficult these decisions must be. Please put school children’s needs first”

“Seems fair in what is a tough time all round”

“Strategy reasonable in the circumstances. Could considering raising extra revenue, suggestion: local lottery, staging fund raising events”

“The strategy seems a balanced approach to deal with increasing financial constraints. I would just emphasise that a cost reduction without detriment to the provision of a required service is an efficiency saving. A

cost reduction that has a detrimental effect on a required service is not an efficiency saving. It is a cut."

Cost of living/Affordability

"I am concerned about people on low incomes: proposed increases may be readily affordable for those on higher incomes, but some people are already struggling to make ends meet - I don't know how they will cope with even small increases."

"In our area, where even working people can't afford basic living necessities, how are the increases going to be paid however justified they are.?"

"I feel that saving jobs should be a priority. In this current climate losing a job could be extremely damaging to not only finances but Health."

"More needs to be done for Pensioner's, Vulnerable and lonely people at a lower cost."

Councillor and Management Costs

"lower the level of middle management - who are doing nothing for their Wages"

"Find additional savings within the Council bureaucracy"

"Look at staffing to cut costs. Do we need as many councillors and their costs?"

Service Investment

"I would like to see the health and social care services increased as this has had a significant impact on our family and that of our community members. Delays in services has had a significant impact on our wellbeing."

"Roads must be a priority. Public transport is non-existent or unusable in many areas. We must spend on our roads to encourage development and jobs. This means prioritising repairs urgently needed"

"Prioritise health, safety and education"

Income Generation/Suggestions

"council are missing out on income on litter dropping /cigarettes butts especially"

"parking permit wardens are non-existent in my area (Aberdare) many illegal parking situations going un-fined."

“Increase hire charges for council facilities”.

“Looks good. One comment, why not use local community groups to help council operatives for some general purpose use. For example litter picking ,informing on general deuteriation in council areas, playing fields etc.”

Savings/Efficiencies

“.....RCT has a vast array of Solar panels that could feed directly into the grid to increase the funds entering the council”

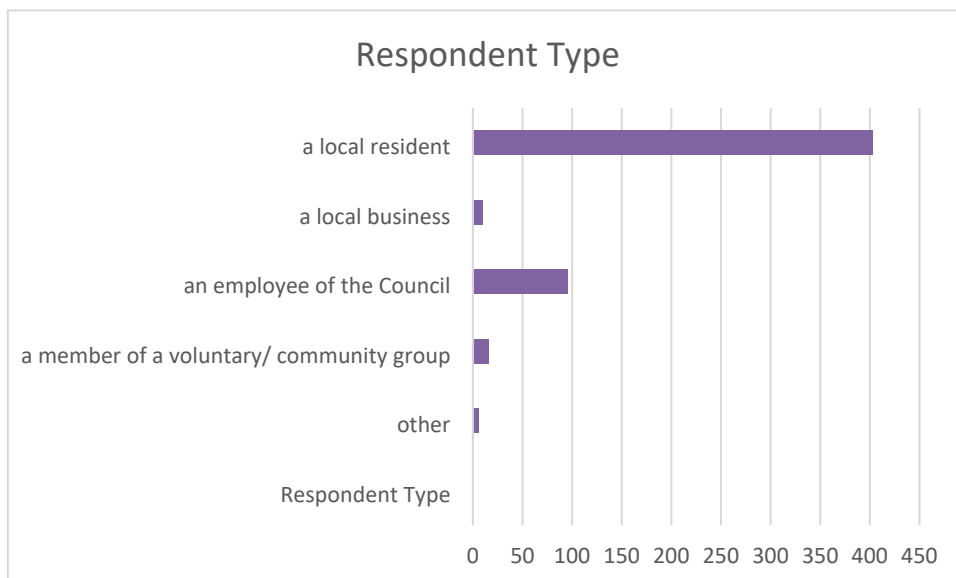
“I think the council need to look at the wastage in every department”

“An easy way to save money is a strict work from home policy. This would massively reduce the cost of heating and electricity paid for by the council.”

“Reduce the 2 day in office to 1 day. This could potentially reduce heating costs and possible the closure and selling of buildings”

About You

4.40 The majority of respondents to the survey were residents (89.6%, or 403 people). Respondents were asked to select all labels that applied to them: 21.1% (95) stated they were employees of the Council, 3.6% (16) were members of a voluntary or community group, 2.2% (10) were a local business and 1.3% (6) selected “Other”.



Note: This was a multiple response question.

Figure 7 – Respondent Type

4.41 Under the Equality Act 2010 and the Public Sector Equality Duties, the Council has a legal duty to look at how its decisions impact on people because they may have particular characteristics. Respondents were asked how the proposals affect them because of:

1. Gender
2. Age
3. Ethnicity
4. Disability
5. Sexuality
6. Religion / belief
7. Gender identity
8. Relationship status
9. Pregnancy
10. Preferred language

4.42 The most frequent theme in the comments was age, with a number of respondents expressing concern over the cost of living. Single-adult families facing rising costs were also mentioned in a number of comments.

The following are a selection of the comments received;

Age

“Age : restricted income on a pension”

“AGE More robust investment in social care as this are is suffering the most , patients not having care packages and needs assessment on discharge from hospital and having to rely on family to meet these needs .this is not acceptable and is putting pressure on families . without investment and recruitment this area will collapse and the aging population will suffer”

“As I think about retirement I increasingly think about what I need as an older person and how the Council supports the community I live in to meet my needs and ensure a happy, active and healthy old age, that does not require me to be stuck in the house 24/7. I want to be part of a community that has lots going on and activities I can enjoy.”

“Age - Being a mum of a young family and a carer to disabled peoples, any increase causes concern for us when things feel tight as it is.”

Disability

“Those with a disability will be impacted. People below the standard level of equality are always negatively impacted when money is taken out of the system”

Gender

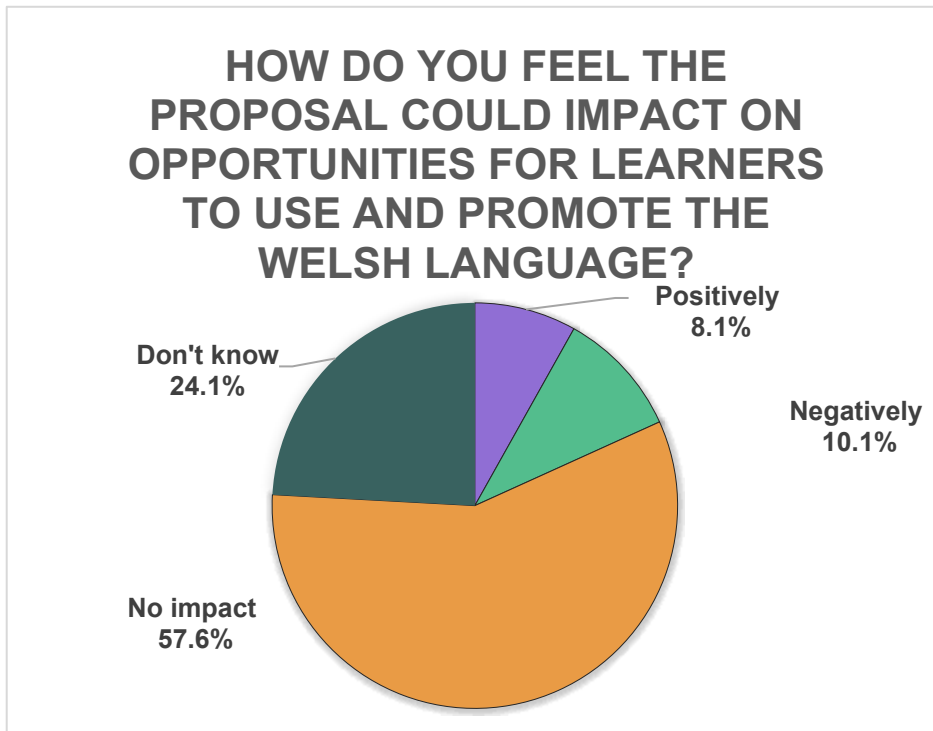
“Sex/gender - traditional females role as a caregiver (as well as working) means an increase in food expenditure for the children at school. This increased costs as well as the council tax would significantly impact us.”

“as a mother of two children who has to work part time as I cannot afford childcare, a rise in council tax will crucify me.”

General

“Cost of living so it would affect every household”

4.43 Under the Welsh Language Measure (2011) and the Welsh Language Standards (No.1) Regulations 2015, the Council has a legal duty to consider how its decisions impact upon the Welsh language. Respondents were asked how they felt the proposal could impact on opportunities for learners to use and promote the Welsh Language.



	Number	%
How do you feel the proposal could impact on opportunities for learners to use and promote the Welsh Language?	Positively	33 8.1%
	Negatively	41 10.1%
	No impact	234 57.6%
	Don't know	98 24.1%
	Total	406

Figure 8 – Impact on Welsh Language learners

- 4.44 Respondents were asked how could positive effects be increased, or negative effects be decreased?

The following are a selection of the comments received, the majority not directly related to the question, but comments around the costs of the Welsh language on the Council and potential savings.

“Bills & telephone enquiries should be in English not Welsh. Everyone speaks & reads English!!”

“Savings could be made by asking people their language preference and where paper correspondence is required...”

“Get rid of funding spends on Welsh language, business will still done and money will be saved.”

“I agree with providing opportunities for all those who wish to speak Welsh and learn Welsh, but stop wasting money making everything bilingual when you are conversing with someone who has enquired in English and is their chosen language.”

“I think the Welsh language is the last thing you should be worrying about when people are struggling to heat their homes and put food on the table.”

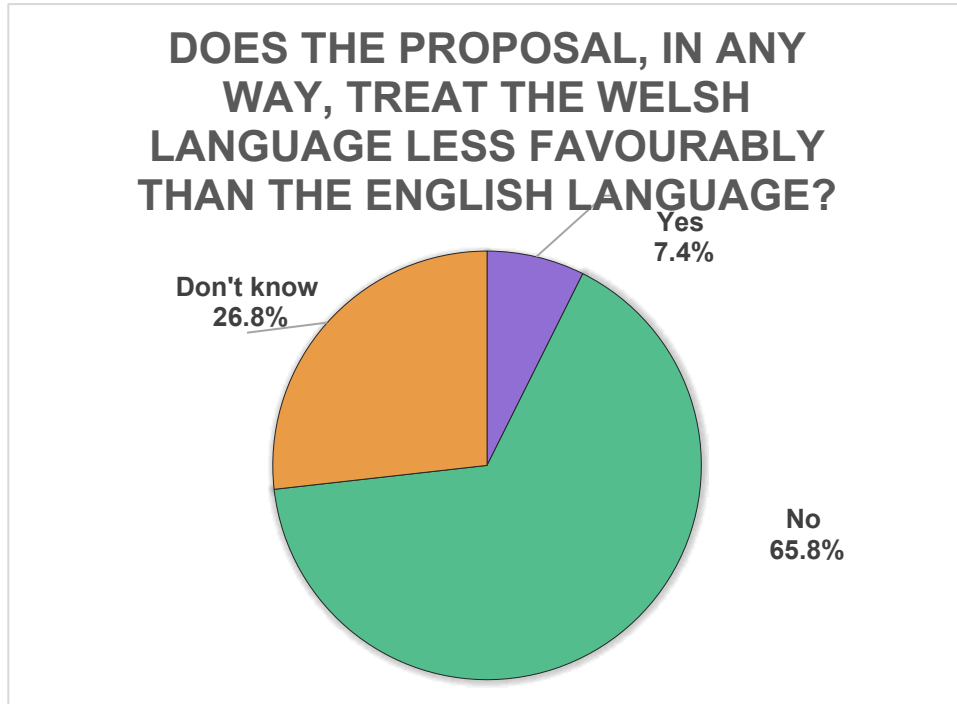
There were a number of positive responses;

“More chances to learn the Welsh medium through official means. Possible discounts and promotions of Welsh learning services to dispel the harmful perception of the Welsh language being a ‘dead language’.”

“more Welsh language recruitment in as many areas as possible to help sustain the use of Welsh in the work place”

“Starting Welsh teaching at a higher level in primary school”.

- 4.45 Respondents were asked if the proposal, in any way, treated the Welsh Language less favourably than the English Language.



	Number	%
Does the proposal, in any way, treat the Welsh Language less favourably than the English language?	Yes	30 7.4%
	No	268 65.8%
	Don't know	109 26.8%
	Total	407

Figure 9 – Welsh Language