

SUBJECT: BUDGET CONSULTATION FEEDBACK 2016/17

REPORT BY: COMMUNICATIONS MANAGER

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

To provide Members with a detailed overview of the feedback gathered during the extensive budget consultation undertaken between 19th October 2015 and 8th January 2016.

The data will be used to help inform the decision-making process prior to the 2016/17 budget being set in February.

2. SUMMARY

CCBC wants to ensure that residents and other key stakeholders across the county borough have the opportunity to help shape the way the council delivers its services in the face of unprecedented budget cuts.

On Wednesday 14th October, Caerphilly county borough council's Cabinet agreed a list of draft savings for the next financial year. The proposals also included a 3.9% increase in Council Tax for 2016/17.

Effective consultation and community engagement is a key factor in informing the budget debate and the resulting feedback will assist members in their decision making process when agreeing the new budget for 2016/17 and beyond.

The budget consultation started on the 19th October 2015 with the launch of a survey. This was followed by a comprehensive programme of engagement activities seeking views both face to face and in writing.

3. LINKS TO STRATEGY

All consultation activity carried out by the council is done in line with the principles and standards as outlined in the CCBC Citizen Engagement Strategy and the Corporate Communications Strategy.

4. THE REPORT

On Wednesday 14th October 2015 Caerphilly county borough council's Cabinet agreed a list of draft savings for the next financial year. The proposals also included a 3.9% increase in Council Tax for 2016/17.

The council wants to ensure that stakeholders from all sections of the community are informed and get the opportunity to engage and have their say about the budget setting process and the ongoing savings agenda.

The focus of the engagement activity was: -

- To inform all residents and stakeholders of the detailed proposals.
- To seek their views about how we can work together to make alternative or additional ways to make savings.
- To manage the impact of the savings proposals on the wider community before the final budget is agreed by Council in February 2016.

Our engagement activities are undertaken in the most inclusive way possible to ensure that as many people as possible get the chance to provide feedback on issues that are important to them.

Audiences

Our audiences were broadly split into the following categories: -

- All CCBC Residents
- Young People
- Older People
- Business Community
- Voluntary Sector
- Viewpoint Panel
- Partner Organisations (LSB etc.)
- Town and Community Councils

Methods

Various engagement methods were used to inform and capture as much feedback as possible from residents and stakeholders including: -

Social Media

In this increasingly digital world, social media is fast becoming the preferred channel of communication for large sections of society. Channels such as Facebook and Twitter were used to signpost residents to the online survey and encourage attendance at face to face sessions.

Survey Online Consultation

The CCBC Website Survey was launched on 19th October 2015 and ran until 8th January 2016. The survey and supporting documentation was made available with a prominent banner link from the home page of the Website to provide direct access to the relevant web pages. User-friendly 'SNAP' software was used for the survey template and this was laid out in a simple and easy to understand format.

Paper documentation

Printed versions of questionnaires and other supporting material were made available and widely circulated across the community. They were also available on request. Completed surveys could be returned by post, or to make this even easier, residents were able to drop them off (without the need for a stamp) at convenient community locations such as libraries, leisure centres, customer service centres and housing offices to encourage the return of completed responses.

Stakeholder survey

Copies of the supporting information and questionnaire were distributed to the following stakeholder groups either electronically or in paper format: -

- Business Forum
- Caerphilly 50+ Forum
- Voluntary sector including GAVO, Valleys Voices projects and the Parent Network
- Viewpoint Panel members (all 800+ were contacted)
- Partner Organisations (LSB)
- All Town/Community Councils
- Online Watch Link (OWL) network
- Equalities Network contacts
- All head teachers for parents

- Intergenerational clubs.

Newsline

This is a key consultation vehicle as Newsline is posted to every home in the county borough (80,000+ properties). A front page article explaining the budget cuts and the consultation process and a 4 page, centre spread 'pull-out' featuring a fully bilingual survey were included in the December 2015 edition of Newsline. Again, completed surveys could be returned at convenient community locations or via the post.

Face-to-face

Stakeholders had the chance to engage face-to-face with officers and members in a number of ways. A series of 10 **drop-in sessions** were organised at venues across the county borough to enable local people to call in for a chat with officers and members and provide feedback on savings proposals.

Date	Time	Venue
Tues 27 th Oct	2.00pm–6.00pm	Blackwood Library
Tues 3 rd Nov	2.00pm–6.00pm	Bargoed Library
Tues 10 th Nov	10.30am-2.30pm	Tabernacle Baptist Church, Newbridge
Thur 12 th Nov	10.30am-2.30pm	White Rose Resource Centre, New Tredegar
Tues 17 th Nov	2.00pm–6.00pm	Ystrad Mynach Library
Wed 18 th Nov	2.00pm–6.00pm	Caerphilly Library
Mon 23 rd Nov	2.00pm–6.00pm	Risca Library, The Palace
Thur 26 th Nov	10.30am-1.00pm	Hafod Deg, Rhymney
Tue 8 th Dec	2.00pm–5.00pm	Abertridwr Library
Wed 16 th Dec	2.00pm–5.00pm	Nelson Library

Viewpoint Panel

Viewpoint Panel members were also invited to attend a meeting in late November to consult members and gather feedback in a structured 'focus group' environment. The meeting was also attended by young people and representatives of the Welsh speaking community.

Additional face to face meetings

Additional face-to-face sessions were arranged for British Sign Language users, Caerphilly Parent Network, Caerphilly Youth and Junior Forums and the Caerphilly 50+ Forum.

Scrutiny meetings

In order to provide Elected Members with every opportunity to fully scrutinise and comment on the specific savings proposals, a series of Special Scrutiny Committee meetings were held in November and December and the views of Members were fed back.

Trade Unions

Trade Unions were engaged throughout the budget setting process.

Summary of Feedback

In total, over 500 people engaged directly across the variety of face-to-face sessions and over 400 surveys were completed online, via Newsline or in paper format. Of these only one was returned in the Welsh language.

A few comments about Senior Pay were submitted as part of the consultation feedback. These comments have been noted, but they are not included in this report due to the authority's ongoing internal investigations.

Generally speaking, respondents were aware of the financial pressures facing the local authority and that the proposals were measured, well thought out and achievable in light of the difficult financial restraints facing the council over the coming years.

"I accept the savings proposals outlined, but I am concerned that you might have to look for alternative cuts in other services should any of these cut backs prove to be unattainable."

"Mostly in agreement with your savings proposals but sad that these have to be addressed. Hopefully things will improve in years to come."

"Generally, well thought out and endeavour to be fair to all sections. Will be interesting to see it in practice."

"Overall the council is doing a good job because of all the cuts from this Tory government but there is a lot more you can do....."

"Llanbradach Council ...accepted the situation given the difficult task faced by Caerphilly County Borough Council."

There was overwhelming support for **protecting frontline services** and reducing management admin costs and **reducing office accommodation** costs through rationalisation. There was also a high degree of support for **reducing rather than removing** services, **focussing on priorities** and being prepared to reduce other things and looking at **alternative ways** of delivering services.

However, less than half of public/stakeholder respondents to the survey agreed with **increasing fees and charges**.

"... Do not increase charges such as Meals on Wheels by more than inflation."

"I cannot give carte blanche to increasing charges, although some fees for leisure activities may merit a small increase."

"I am in agreement with some fees & charges for certain things to be increased but not others i.e.: charge the going rate for registry office facilities but car parking charges are high enough as it is!"

There were mixed views in relation to the proposed Council Tax rise.

"The council cannot just keep cutting and cutting. I suggest you raise council tax if necessary."

"As a council tax payer I would support the Council's raising council tax to the maximum"

permitted level in order to protect services.”

“A near 4% rise in council tax is outrageous.”

“The continuing rises in council tax may well cause more defaulters on payments.”

The proposals of most concern to residents came under the remit of **Social Services**, in particular cuts in support for carers, respite care, day care services, learning disability services and stroke services

“I strongly disagree with the cuts to the social services budget, particularly those where there is an impact on Carers. Carers save the UK 119 billion pounds annually (Carers UK, 2014), and reducing access to respite, curtailing services like shopping, and limiting access to day care will impact on those who are the most vulnerable.”

“I am whole-heartedly against any sort of cut that affects social services, vulnerable children/adults.”

“I fear that many of the cost saving proposals, particularly in the Social Services and Public Protection arena, will impact on the most vulnerable people in our borough and impact on people at times of considerable stress/trauma.”

“I am greatly concerned at the proposal to withdraw the contract with the Stroke Association. ... Currently this contract funds a service to put stroke victims in touch with the Stroke Association and is the major source of new contacts. If this service is withdrawn an alternative system of referral to the Stroke Association must be found and put in place.”

Others areas of concern included: -

- Removal of the trading standards post

“I also don't agree with the removal of trading standards or EHO posts. It is important to ensure that these areas are monitored in a borough such as Caerphilly to keep on top of rogue traders and those who seek to run food business in ways which could threaten the health of those of us paying our council tax.”

- Reducing breakfast club costs and charging schools for sandwich placements:

“Some children don't have breakfast at home it is essential to keep breakfast clubs in school, we must look after the next generation.”

“Sandwich places - will charge the schools. School will pass on costs - schools will not have money to spend on other things.”

- Review Blackwood Miners and the Winding House

“I am writing to protest at the proposed cuts to Blackwood Miner's Institute - a most valued local asset. ... I can't help but feel that the figure has been plucked from the air and is in no way based upon any careful consideration of the likely impact to the wide-ranging service offered to Caerphilly residents”

“I am especially sad to see that two of the County Borough's leading cultural facilities (Blackwood Miners Institute and the Winding House) have been identified for cost savings and are now under threat of having their budgets substantially slashed”

- Cuts to road resurfacing budget

“I'm worried that the proposed £100k cut to roads could be a false economy. The roads will get worse and will need to be fixed eventually, by which time it could cost the council more”

“Reducing road maintenance is folly. It will increase the council's costs as roads will need more repair work”

A general theme was identified around the need to consider the **long-term impact** of the proposed savings and not just the short term benefits. In particular, the ‘knock-on’ effect on service users and other agencies should be taken into account. Investment in prevention saves money in the long term, particularly where savings are small and the impact can be potentially big e.g. carers support, pest control charges etc.

“The cuts being made will have huge impact on the elderly population of Caerphilly, at a time when the NHS is at breaking point and there is bed blocking and delayed discharges already taking place. The cuts being made to Third sector/voluntary organisations e.g. Age Cymru, Stroke Association will have a huge impact.”

Many of the issues raised in the survey responses reflect the views of the Youth Forum, Viewpoint Panel members and 50+ Forum members.

Details are set out in the appendices shown below and are available by visiting the Council website: <http://www.caerphilly.gov.uk/involved/Consultations>

- Appendix 1 Overview and survey analysis and feedback
- Appendix 2 Drop in Session feedback
- Appendix 3 Youth and Junior Forum feedback
- Appendix 4 Viewpoint Panel feedback
- Appendix 5 Voluntary Sector Liaison Committee Report
- Appendix 6 Caerphilly 50+ Forum feedback

5. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

Due consideration was given to Equalities in the methodology used and in the construction of the relevant surveys.

Each survey included equalities monitoring questions and a question to seek views on how any of the proposed changes would impact differently on those covered protected characteristics under the Equalities Act (2010).

Equality Impact assessments for each saving proposal that affects the public and/or service users was undertaken alongside the consultation by service areas.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The costs associated with the consultation activities outlined within this report have been covered by a specific public engagement budget which falls within the overall Communications Unit budget.

7. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

None

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

Members are asked to note the content of this report.

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