

BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO CABINET

10 JANUARY 2017

REPORT OF THE HEAD OF FINANCE AND SECTION 151 OFFICER

OUTCOME OF THE CONSULTATION 'SHAPING BRIDGEND'S FUTURE'

1.0 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to inform Cabinet of the outcome of the 'Shaping Bridgend's Future' consultation which asked citizens to share their views on a number of key budget proposals being considered over the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) period.
- 1.2 This report provides an overview of the budget consultation activities, analysis and key findings.

2.0 Connection to Corporate Improvement Objectives / Other Corporate Priorities

- 2.1 The 'Shaping Bridgend's Future' consultation sought to obtain views on specific budget reduction proposals across council directorates. In addition the allocation of financial resources determines the council's ability to meet its corporate objectives. As such the report links to all corporate priorities.

3.0 Background

- 3.1 Following continued reductions in funding from central government all councils across the country are having to change the way they work and the services they provide so that they can manage with less. Bridgend County Borough Council has made reductions from its budget of over £38 million since 2012. Over the next four years the council is expecting to continue making reductions, totalling around £34 million.
- 3.2 Respondents were asked, using budget sliders and preference selectors, to share their views on 15 key budget proposals being considered between 2017-18 and 2020-21, including: collaborating with other authorities, reviewing the council's partnerships with Awen and Halo, merge service locations, increasing vigilance on council tax exemptions/discounts eligibility, digitalisation of services, reduction in community cleaning, removal of school budget protection, investment in property and investment in a community action fund.
- 3.3 Budget consultation exercises have been undertaken annually since 2013/14. This 'Shaping Bridgend's Future' consultation exercise has built on the knowledge gained from the previous three consultations and further

developed the consultation to include new ways for people to participate and engage with the council.

- 3.4 The budget consultation overview, document and survey was made available between 6 October 2016 and 1 December 2016. The survey was available to complete on the council's website, by visiting: www.bridgend.gov.uk/future, or by visiting a local library.
- 3.5 The consultation aimed to reach the following key stakeholders: citizens, schools, BCBC cabinet members/councillors, local businesses, the third sector, council staff, trade unions, town and community councils, partner organisations, equality groups, youth services/council and local media.
- 3.6 Communication and promotional activities included a radio campaign with Bridge FM, various press release/editorials in the Gazette and other local media, a social media/web campaign, development of five short films, poster/sign campaign, direct marketing to key target audiences e.g. businesses, schools, youth council, internal communications campaign for staff and elected members.
- 3.7 Methods of engagement included a survey (available online and hard copy at all local libraries), engagement events and town centre engagement stands, social media debates, a dedicated Citizen's Panel survey. As part of the engagement and town centre events, citizens could also fill in comment cards and take part in a coin game to prioritise budget proposals. A bespoke survey was also designed for youth engagement. Responses were also welcome via letter, email or telephone.
- 3.8 A target was set for this consultation exercise to improve on last year's response of 1,819 responses to represent over one per cent of the population of Bridgend County Borough.

4.0 Current Situation / proposal

- 4.1 The attached consultation report (appendix 1) sets out in detail the views expressed by those who participated.
- 4.2 Overall, the council has received 2,533 responses via the various consultation mechanisms identified in 3.7. A breakdown of these is documented in the consultation report.
- 4.3 The response rate can be summarised as:
 - 1,630 responses to the surveys were received in total including responses gathered through the Citizens' Panel outlet – of the responses received there were 1,210 online submissions and 334 paper versions returned. There were also 46 responses to the youth version of the survey. The remaining 86 responses were completions received from the three community engagement events and elected members' meeting.

- Of the 1,630 responses, 832 surveys were received directly from the Citizens' Panel – 498 were received online and 334 paper versions.
- In total, there were 262 individual interactions at the public community engagement stands across the county borough. Overall there were 125 comment cards and 453 counter game interactions received at the engagement stands and 86 from attendees at engagement workshops.
- During the consultation period there were a total of 518 interactions using social media. This includes two social media question and answer sessions where 123 interactions were received from Twitter and Facebook
- Two trade unions responded - neither felt able to complete the consultation questionnaire, but would continue to engage with the council on regular basis regarding the implementation of specific budget reduction proposals as and when they were brought forward for delivery.
- No comments were received by letter, email or telephone call.

4.4 Headline figures and themes include:

- Automating council services was the only proposal to receive more respondents disagreeing (44%) than agreeing (42%). The older respondents were the less likely they were to support the proposal. Those aged under 44 years old supported its introduction.
- Collaborating services with other authorities was the most supported proposal with almost nine in ten (86%) agreeing with its introduction. This was closely followed by reviewing our arts, culture and libraries partnership (85%), reviewing vigilance on residents' eligibility for council tax discounts or exemptions (77%) and investing in property (77%).
- Three in four (77%) respondents believed certain services should be protected over others. Care for older people (86%), schools and social services (81%) and waste and recycling (64%). Areas selected to receive a reduction in order to protect other services were libraries, arts and adult education (48%), sports and recreational services (39%) and environment health and development (27%).
- Streamlining staff, resources and procedures (18%), reviewing staff wages (14%) and merging with neighbouring authorities or town councils (14%) were the three most popular suggestions for saving money.
- Investing in property (17%), enforcement charges (16%), use in-house skill to provide paid for services (15%) were the three most popular suggestions for making money.

4.5 Report conclusions

4.5.1 The overall response rate is very positive, significantly exceeding the target of 1,819 set. In comparison we have received 714 more interactions than the previous year's combined responses (survey, simulator, event attendance and social media replies). Direct comparisons:

- Survey completions (general and Citizens' Panel) of 1,630 this year shows a 65% increase from 989 responses last year and a 327% increase from 382 responses the year before.
- Social media replies/comments of 518 this year compared to 334 last year, an increase of 55%.
- Event attendance of 86 (four events) this year compared to 81 last year (six events), a small increase despite a reduction in the number of events hosted. Survey completions are able to measure demographic information which allows us to understand which stakeholders have engaged with us. Key statistics are:

Age	Number
Under 18	31
18 – 24	21
25 – 34	183
35 – 44	227
45 – 54	294
55 – 64	302
65+	199
Prefer not to say	18
Total	1,389

4.5.2 The majority of respondents responded very positively to budget consultation. There was strong support for protecting some budgets over others, and of the 15 budget proposals, nine received majority support, and with even the most negative still receiving 44% support.

4.5.3 The least support was to automate more services even if this means losing traditional methods of contact. The proposal received a positive response from 42% of respondents.

4.5.4 Electronic methods such as online survey, films and social media have received larger levels of engagement and interaction compared to more traditional methods such as events, radio advertisement and paper-based surveys. The evening engagement events on a whole was improved through using already existing groups (e.g. Porthcawl's U3A). However, physical engagement is proving less successful than electronic engagement.

5.0 Effect upon Policy Framework and Procedure Rules

5.1 There are no proposed changes to the policy framework and procedure rules.

6.0 Equality Impact Assessment

- 6.1 An Equality Impact Assessment has been carried out and no equality issues have been identified. Budget reduction proposals pursued will be subject to the appropriate equality impact assessment prior to implementation.

7.0 Financial Implications

- 7.1 The consultation report seeks to inform and aid cabinet members' decisions on the future direction of the council and how to meet the challenging budget constraints in the years ahead.

8.0 Recommendation

- 8.1 Cabinet is recommended to note the outcome of the consultation with interested parties as detailed in the attached consultation report.

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Appendix 1: Shaping Bridgend's Future Consultation Report

Background Documents - None