

BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO CABINET

19 DECEMBER 2017

REPORT OF THE HEAD OF FINANCE AND SECTION 151 OFFICER

OUTCOME OF THE CONSULTATION 'SHAPING BRIDGEND'S FUTURE'

1 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to inform Cabinet of the outcome of the 'Shaping Bridgend's Future' 2017 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 Connection to Corporate Improvement Objectives / Other Corporate Priorities

- 2.1 The 'Shaping Bridgend's Future' 2017 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 Background

- 3.1 Following further reductions in funding from central government, all councils across the country are continuing 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 £36 million over the last four years, with an expectation of significant further reductions required.
- 3.2 Respondents were asked to share their views on a range of budget proposals being considered between 2018-19 and 2021-22, including: proposed increases to council tax, considering which services to protect and/or cut over others, investments and commercial services, regulatory services, back office administration, leisure and cultural services (our partnerships with Awen and Halo Leisure), social services and nursery education.
- 3.3 Budget consultation exercises have been undertaken annually since 2013-14. This 'Shaping Bridgend's Future' 2017 consultation exercise has built on the knowledge gained from the previous consultations and further developed the consultation to include new ways for people to participate and engage with the council. For example, further work has been done to encourage more views from younger people this year. As a result, responses to the youth survey have increased to 121 compared with 46 last year, a 163% increase.

- 3.4 The budget consultation overview, document and different surveys were made available between 12 October and 3 December 2017. The surveys were available on the council's website at: www.bridgend.gov.uk/future, while paper copies were available to complete at local libraries and other venues.
- 3.5 The consultation aimed to reach the following key stakeholders: citizens of Bridgend County Borough, schools, BCBC cabinet members/councillors, local businesses, the third sector, council staff, town and community councils, partner organisations, community and equality groups, youth services/council and local media.
- 3.6 The consultation was supported by a full communications and promotional plan. The main activities included: a Wales Online package (Glamorgan Gazette and targeted digital campaign), various press release/editorials in the Glamorgan Gazette and other local media, a social media/web campaign, poster/sign campaign, direct marketing to key target audiences e.g. businesses, schools, youth council and internal communications for staff and elected members.
- 3.7 Methods of engagement included a survey (available online and paper copies at all local libraries), community engagement events (open to the public to attend), elected member workshops, other meetings/networking events, social media debates and comments, and a dedicated Citizens' Panel survey (available online and paper copies). A bespoke survey was also designed for youth engagement and an accessible version of the survey was also available. Survey completions and/or comments were collated as part of the different events and meetings. Feedback to the consultation was also welcome via letter, email or telephone.

4 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 2619 responses via the various consultation mechanisms identified in 3.7. The 2619 interactions total 1.83% of the Bridgend County Borough population and represents a 3.4% increase on last year's figure of 2533.
- 4.3 The response rate, in summary:
- 1858 responses to the surveys were received in total. This represents a 13.9% increase on last year's total of 1630.
 - Overall 152 people attended the various events, workshops and meetings. This represents a 76.7% increase on last year's total of 86.
 - A total of 593 interactions were received via social media. This includes 226 interactions from the live question and answer (Q&A) session. This represents a 7.49% decrease for overall interactions compared to last year's figure of 641 but an 83.74% increase compared to last year's figure of 123 for the Q&A.

- 16 comments were received by email and telephone. No responses were received via letter.

4.4 These figures are broken down and where comparable an increase or decrease as a percentage figure against last year's responses is indicated in the table below:

| METHOD | Number | %Increase/decrease |
|--|-------------------|---------------------------|
| Shaping Bridgend's Future survey | Online: 1172 | 56% increase |
| | Paper: 9 | 0%* |
| | Youth :118 | 157% increase |
| | Accessibility: 50 | 0%* |
| Citizens' Panel survey | Online: 318 | 36% decrease |
| | Paper: 187 | 44% decrease |
| | Youth :3 | 0%* |
| | Accessibility: 1 | 0%* |
| Community Events (workshops and closed groups) | 115 | 51% increase |
| Elected Members Workshop | 37 | 270% increase |
| Social media interactions | 593 | 7% decrease |
| Emails | 9 | 0%* |
| Phone calls | 7 | 0%* |
| TOTAL | 2619 | N/A |

* 0% increase/decrease has been recorded where the difference is negligible.

4.5 To date 11 paper copies of the survey have been received after the consultation has closed and have not been included in the above figures or subsequent analysis.

4.6 Headline figures and themes include:

Council increase/decrease and protecting/cutting services

Summary key statistics:

- Of the five choices, the most popular response was that people were not prepared to increase council tax in order to help protect current service levels with 25% of respondents agreeing overall. 17% of respondents were however prepared to increase council tax by 5%. Demographically more respondents over 65 were prepared to increase council tax by 5% whilst those under 65 were only prepared to increase it by 1%.

- 21% of respondents chose to protect 'care of older people and services for disabled people' through an increase in council tax whilst knowing that the council would have to cut other services more severely to achieve this. This was closely followed by 19% of respondents wishing to protect 'schools, youth services and children's social services'.
- Based on survey responses, in order to minimise the increase on council tax and save other services, 'cultural services including libraries, art centres and theatres' and 'sports and recreational services' are the two main services the public are willing to cut by 39% and 31% respectively. 30% of participants also said they did not want to cut any services.

Other key findings:

- When considering the council's investment ambitions and available funds the most popular response was 23% for 'schools' as the priority for investment. The second highest response was 'roads' with 21% followed by 'regeneration projects' with 20% of the responses. The lowest ranked priorities with 5% was 'sea defences', closely followed by 'don't prioritise' with 6% of the responses.
- The survey results show that 50% of respondents are willing to accept higher charges. These included charging extra for 'sports pitches' (40%), 'libraries' (42%) and 'pest control' (36%). However, 22% of respondents are not willing to accept higher charges, in particular for 'burials' (48%) and 'car parking' (43%).
- 43% of respondents agreed with the proposed savings to regulatory services knowing that it might mean some services may take longer to provide. Similarly 51% of respondents agreed with reducing administration costs of different council departments even if it meant paying suppliers later or taking longer to respond to correspondence.
- 75% of respondents think that further efficiencies are possible within leisure and cultural services but did not believe the council should reduce the current service level in order to achieve this.
- 50% of respondents agreed that the current approach for transforming social services was the right approach and accepted that this takes time. 32% agreed but felt that social services must make the savings somehow to avoid further cuts to other council services.
- Upon collectively analysing the 'open comments' responses the following was noticed:
 - 35% of respondents believed further efficiencies could be made with waste and recycling with 14% of respondents believing that the council could charge more for this service when asked about services the council should charge for.

- 16% of people believed the council could make further efficiencies in staff reduction/managers/councillor wages. It was also noticed that 31% believed the council could save money on cutting senior staff and economic privileges i.e. wages, expense and pensions.
- 14% thought the council should charge for on road parking in relation to fines for obstruction, resident parking and blue badge holders.
- Similar themes were noted across social media e.g. 18% of comments related to councillors/senior staff and cutting wages and expenses etc.

4.7 Survey completions are able to measure demographic information which allows us to understand which stakeholders have engaged with us. In some cases this information was already known e.g. Citizens' Panel members. Providing this information was optional for other respondents, however this question was not included in the accessible version of the survey.

Key statistics:

| Age | Total |
|--------------------------|-------------|
| Under 18 | 50 |
| 18 - 24 | 66 |
| 25 - 34 | 105 |
| 35 - 44 | 180 |
| 45 - 54 | 203 |
| 55 - 64 | 200 |
| 65 - 74 | 178 |
| 75+ | 80 |
| Prefer not to say | 25 |
| Grand Total | 1087 |

4.8 Digital engagement methods such as online surveys, social media and the digital part of the Wales Online package received larger levels of engagement and interaction compared to more traditional methods such as events and paper-based surveys. Key statistics:

- The consultation webpage was viewed 15,129 times during the consultation period, which compares with 6,744 for last year.
- Of the 15,129 webpage views, 41% of views were as a direct result of the Wales Online digital campaign which replaced the radio campaign adopted in previous years.
- The number of completed online surveys (stand alone and Citizens' Panel only) this year was 1490 with 196 paper copies. This represents a 23% increase in online completions and a decrease in paper completions of 41% compared to last year.

- Although social media interactions in total were down by 7% this year compared with last year, there was significant increase in the Q&A element of this at 84%. Visibility of the messages during the Q&A were up 30% for Twitter and 46% for Facebook compared with last year.

5 Effect upon Policy Framework and Procedure Rules

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

6 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 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 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**