

BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO CABINET

14 DECEMBER 2021

REPORT OF THE INTERIM CHIEF OFFICER - FINANCE, PERFORMANCE AND CHANGE

OUTCOME OF THE CONSULTATION 'SHAPING BRIDGEND'S FUTURE' 2021

1 Purpose of report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to inform Cabinet of the outcome of the 'Shaping Bridgend's Future' 2021 budget consultation which asked citizens to help to determine a longer term vision for the county borough. The intention was to understand what the public felt had worked well, and where we need to continue to make changes or improvements as we recover from the Covid-19 pandemic, to ensure that we deliver effective and efficient services that are right for our communities over the next 5 to 10 years.

2 Connections to corporate well-being objectives / other corporate priorities

- 2.1 This report assists in the achievement of the following corporate well-being objective under the **Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015**:

1. **Supporting a successful sustainable economy** – taking steps to make the county borough a great place to do business, for people to live, work, study and visit, and to ensure that our schools are focussed on raising the skills, qualifications and ambitions for all people in the county borough.
2. **Helping people and communities to be more healthy and resilient** - taking steps to reduce or prevent people from becoming vulnerable or dependent on the Council and its services. Supporting individuals and communities to build resilience, and enable them to develop solutions to have active, healthy and independent lives.
3. **Smarter use of resources** – ensure that all resources (financial, physical, ecological, human and technological) are used as effectively and efficiently as possible and support the creation of resources throughout the community that can help to deliver the Council's well-being objectives.

- 2.2 The 'Shaping Bridgend's Future' 2021 consultation sought to obtain views on the council's spending priorities and approach following the Covid-19 pandemic. The allocation of financial resources determines the council's ability to meet its well-being objectives. As such the report links to all well-being objectives.

3 Background

- 3.1 Following several years of reductions in funding from central government, and continued financial pressures, along with addressing post-Covid-19 recovery, 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 (BCBC) has made reductions from its budget of £18 million over the last four years (2018-19 to 2021-22), with an expectation of significant further reductions required over the next four years.

- 3.2 A public consultation exercise was undertaken over an eight week period from 20 September 2021 to 14 November 2021. Respondents were asked to share their views on a range of areas including:
- ❖ Performance over the past 12 months;
 - ❖ Support for Business, Tourism and the economy;
 - ❖ Wellbeing;
 - ❖ Customer face-to-face access;
 - ❖ Digitalisation;
 - ❖ Investment in services:
 - ❖ Fees and charges;
 - ❖ Council Tax levels;
 - ❖ The Future.
- 3.3 Budget consultation exercises have been undertaken annually since 2013-14. This 'Shaping Bridgend's Future' 2021 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, as well as adapting to the challenges that the pandemic has created. A wide variety of methods of communication were used including surveys, social media, a number of online engagement sessions, online FAQ sessions as well as videos, radio adverts and media releases. Due to the impact of Covid-19 and the restrictions on engaging with residents face to face in the community, the council wanted to make sure that as many people as possible could get involved in the consultation and ensured that accessible versions of the survey were available – large print, easy read and youth, as well as standard. Bridgend People First and Bridgend Youth Council supported the consultation team to produce the easy read and youth surveys. An advert was also placed in the Glamorgan Gazette notifying non-domestic rates payers of the consultation, and inviting them to participate, as required by Section 65 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992.
- 3.4 In order to gather views of young people the consultation team attended the Bridgend Youth Council meeting on 13 October 2021. The Youth Council took part in discussions around some of the key questions within the consultation and were encouraged to complete the full consultation online. 12 young people engaged in the session. In addition, in order to encourage participation of young people within Bridgend secondary schools and Bridgend College the consultation team wrote to all governing bodies and headteachers as well as the Principal of Bridgend College to promote the consultation amongst their learners as well as school staff and parents/carers.
- 3.5 The budget consultation was live between 20 September 2021 and 14 November 2021. The surveys were available on the council's website and paper copies were sent directly to residents upon request.

- 3.6 The consultation aimed to reach the following key stakeholders: general public/residents, Citizens' Panel members, elected members, BCBC employees, Bridgend businesses, town and community councils, school governors, Bridgend Community Cohesion and Equality Forum (BCCEF) members, local interest/community groups, BAVO, Bridgend College, partners, secondary schools (including head teachers) and media outlets.
- 3.7 The consultation was supported by a full communications and promotional plan. The main activities included three media releases, a BCBC budget explainer video, various press release/editorials in the media, a social media/web campaign, radio campaign, direct marketing to key target audiences e.g. businesses, schools, youth council and internal communications for staff and elected members.
- 3.8 A seven-minute podcast was also produced between local DJ Lee Jukes and the Leader of the Council, Cllr Huw David, explaining the purpose of the budget consultation and the importance of taking part. The media releases were featured at the media centre of the council's website where they were hyperlinked with associated social media publicity, including the podcast. Overall podcast views were 2,515.
- 3.9 In addition to general social media content, two polls were created on Twitter which generated 41 votes to key questions within the budget consultation survey.
- 3.10 The Shaping Bridgend's Future consultation was included in six weekly govDelivery bulletins and one stand-alone bulletin during the live period. govDelivery is a digital communications tool that was introduced by the local authority in June 2020 to issue council updates directly to residents' email inboxes in the language of their choice. There are currently 36,597 English language subscribers and 223 Welsh language subscribers from Bridgend County Borough to the weekly Covid-19 update emails. Overall, govDelivery generated 1,652 link clicks through to the budget consultation.

4 Current situation/proposal

- 4.1 The attached consultation report (**Appendix A**) sets out in detail the views expressed by those who participated.
- 4.2 Overall the consultation received **1,115** interactions from a combination of survey completions, attendance at engagement events (online and face-to-face), social media engagement and via the authority's Citizens' Panel.

Due to the impact of Covid-19 this represents a decrease of 39% on last year's overall interactions. A total of 737 survey responses were received, this demonstrates a decrease of 48% on last year's survey completions. The consultation and engagement team attended 17 online and face to face meetings during the live period resulting in 275 face to face interactions with people in online events. This represents an increase of 37% on last year.

- 4.3 The response rate, by method of interaction is set out below:

Interactions	Number
Survey completions	737
Events/meetings/workshops	275
Emails	7
Letters	0
Telephone calls	0
Social media comments	55
Social media polls	41
Total interactions	1115

- 1,115 responses to the surveys were received in total.
- Overall 275 people attended the various online events and meetings.
- A total of 96 interactions were received via social media. This includes 55 social media comments and 41 social media poll votes.
- Seven comments were received by email.

4.4 **Headline figures and themes include:**

4.4.1 Performance over the past 12 months:

- Overall respondents stated that the council had not been effective in meeting its values over the past 12 months;
- Overall respondents did not feel that council had met its strategic aims over the past 12 months.

4.4.2 Support for Business, Tourism and the economy:

- Overall respondents stated that support for local businesses, the promotion of the town centres and supporting the visitor economy and the sustainability of culture and leisure venues was important or very important;
- Respondents also stated that labour market opportunities and business start-up opportunities were important or very important.

4.4.3 Wellbeing:

- Overall respondents stated that the council had performed OK in delivering wellbeing services over the past 12 months;
- The top three services to be prioritise for the future were support for older people, followed by food poverty and then homelessness;
- The majority of respondents stated that the council should continue to deliver services such as period dignity, domestic abuse support, flying start, school applications, reporting an issue such as fly tipping, youth justice and youth services remotely/online.

4.4.4 Customer face-to-face access:

- The most common methods for contacting the council in place of face-to-face services while Civic Offices have been closed were telephone followed by email and then website;
- The majority of respondents stated that it is a priority for the council to reopen the face-to-face channel to the public;
- The majority of respondents stated that they would prefer to access services in their local community rather than in Civic Offices.

4.4.5 Digitalisation:

- The majority of respondents stated that when Civic Offices reopen they will continue to access services online, a further 24% of respondents stated that they always preferred to access services online;
- When asked what would help you or someone you know access services online the majority stated improved internet access/Wi-Fi followed by digital champions in libraries and then printable 'how to' guides;
- The majority of respondents stated that had signed up to govDelivery, when asked to rate the content of the weekly emails 20% stated excellent and a further 39% stated good.

4.4.6 Investment in services:

- Respondents stated that the council should prioritise spending on regeneration projects followed by roads and then schools.

4.4.7 Fees and charges:

- The majority of respondents stated that the council should resume charges for services that have not been charged for during the pandemic;
- When asked 'Do you think there are there any other services the council could charge for to increase revenue' the most common responses were charge for car parking, followed by reassess current spending and then fines for littering and dog fouling, reduce the number of staff in the council and their pay and recycling and waste collection charges.

4.4.8 Council tax levels:

- When asked to select which statement best represents your views on setting the council tax for 2022-2023 the majority of respondents (54%) stated to keep council tax levels the same level and 29% of respondents were prepared to increase council tax by 3.5%.

4.4.9 The future:

- When asked 'What do you think our long term priorities for the future should be' respondents selected make more efficiencies in-house i.e. review processes and

rationalise the number of offices followed by encourage citizens to take more responsibility i.e. litter, graffiti etc. and then focus on economic growth i.e. supporting businesses;

- The three services that had been the most important to residents over the past 12 months were recycling and waste followed by highways and infrastructure improvements and then sport and recreational services (including parks, leisure centres and open spaces).

5. Effect upon policy framework and procedure rules

5.1 There is no impact on the policy framework and procedure rules.

6. Equality Act 2010 implications

6.1 The protected characteristics identified within the Equality Act, Socio-economic Duty and the impact on the use of the Welsh language have been considered in the preparation of this report. As a public body in Wales, the Council must consider the impact of strategic decisions, such as the development or the review of policies, strategies, services and functions. This is an information report, therefore it is not necessary to carry out an EIA in the production of this report. It is considered that there will be no significant or unacceptable equality impacts as a result of this report.

7. Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 implications

7.1 The well-being goals identified in the Act were considered in the preparation of the Budget Consultation. Officers have considered the importance of balancing short-term needs in terms of meeting savings targets, while safeguarding the ability to meet longer-term objectives and maintain sustainable services, when proposals were devised. A full Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 assessment will be completed for the final MTFS presented to Council in February 2022.

8. Financial implications

8.1 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.

9. Recommendation

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

Gill Lewis

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Background Documents: None