

BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO CABINET

7 FEBRUARY 2023

REPORT OF THE CHIEF OFFICER - FINANCE, PERFORMANCE AND CHANGE

OUTCOME OF THE CONSULTATION 'SHAPING BRIDGEND'S FUTURE' 2022

1 Purpose of report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to inform Cabinet of the outcome of the 'Shaping Bridgend's Future' 2022 budget consultation which asked citizens their views on what they consider should be the priority areas for allocating the budget for the forthcoming financial year, and to examine those views against funding provided by the Welsh Government.

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

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

- 2.1 **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.
- 2.2 **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.
- 2.3 **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.

3 Background

- 3.1 Budget planning for the financial year 2023-24 is more uncertain than ever before. As well as the ongoing impact of the covid-19 pandemic, the conflict in Ukraine has contributed to the rise of energy and other prices globally, leading to the current cost-of-living crisis which will also have a significant impact on the Council's overall costs.
- 3.2 The Council faces an unprecedented financial challenge over the coming years, which estimates a funding gap of up to £20m in the 2023/24 financial period.

- 3.3 The Council is facing even more cost pressures going forward than have been experienced in previous years, and it will likely become more challenging to continue providing the same level of services whilst attempting to continue supporting our older and more vulnerable members of society.
- 3.4 The Council is dependent on funding from Welsh Government to provide vital services. The financial settlement from Welsh Government for 2022/23 was significantly better than anticipated but the projections for 2023/24 onwards are not as favourable, particularly as national economic circumstances have significantly changed in recent months.
- 3.5 The consultation set out that the cost-of-living pressures that all residents are experiencing are also being felt by the local authority and that to support services going forward the Council will have to consider an increase in council tax in the coming financial year and therefore input to the survey would assist in identifying those council services that are most valued and that we should continue to fund.
- 3.6 A public consultation exercise was undertaken over a five-week period from 19 December 2022 to 22 January 2023. Respondents were asked to share their views and priorities across the following areas:
- prioritising council services
 - council tax levels
 - digitalisation of council services
 - How the council has performed over the past 12 months
- 3.7 Budget consultation exercises have been undertaken annually since 2013-14. The 'Shaping Bridgend's Future' 2022 consultation exercise has built on the knowledge gained from the previous consultations as well as utilising a new digital engagement platform to drive new ways for people to participate and engage with the Council. A wide variety of methods of communication were used including surveys, quick poll, social media, face-to-face drop-in sessions, as well as an explainer video, radio adverts and media releases.
- 3.8 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. 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.
- 3.9 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 Bridgend College to promote the consultation amongst their learners as well as school staff and parents/carers.
- 3.10 The budget consultation was live between 19 December 2022 and 22 January 2023. The surveys were available on the Council's website and paper copies were available to residents upon request.
- 3.11 The consultation aimed to reach the following key stakeholders: general public/residents, Citizens' Panel members, elected members, Bridgend County

Borough Council (BCBC) employees, businesses, Bridgend Business Forum members, local media, town councillors, school governors, Bridgend Community Cohesion and Equality Forum (BCCEF) members.

- 3.12 The consultation was supported by a full communications and promotional plan. The main activities included 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.
- 3.13 The Shaping Bridgend's Future 2022 consultation was included in twelve govDelivery bulletins, including one stand-alone bulletin during the live period. govDelivery is a digital communications platform 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 39,596 English language subscribers and 251 Welsh language subscribers from Bridgend County Borough to the weekly news update emails. Overall, govDelivery generated 2,381 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 **1,441** interactions from a combination of survey completions, attendance at engagement events (face-to-face drop-in sessions), social media engagement and via the Council's Citizens' Panel.

In total, there were 1,079 responses to the online survey: from our standard, Citizen Panel, Easy read, large print and youth versions.

4.3 Marketing and engagement methods

Details of the consultation were shared with the following stakeholders: general public/residents, Citizens' Panel members, elected members, Council employees, businesses, Bridgend Business Forum members, local media, town councils, school governors, Bridgend Community Cohesion and Equality Forum (BCCEF) members.

4.4 Social Media

The Council currently has 14,666 followers on its English Twitter account and 364 on its Welsh Twitter account, 18,876 followers on its English Facebook page and 220 on the Welsh Facebook page, 3,155 followers on Instagram and 6,105 followers on LinkedIn and 171 subscribers on YouTube. While content is most likely to be seen by these users, it is also displayed to users who are not connected to the accounts.

Details of the success of the social media and website campaigns can be found in the full consultation report, **Appendix A**.

4.5 govDelivery

govDelivery is a digital communications platform that was introduced by the local authority in June 2020 to improve communication. It is currently used to issue Council updates directly to residents' email inboxes in the language of their choice.

There are currently 35,630 English language and 252 Welsh language users who have subscribed to receive the Council's weekly update emails.

Shaping Bridgend's Future Budget consultation was included in the following bulletins and details on these bulletins can be found in the full consultation report, **Appendix A**.

4.6 **Media and publicity**

4.6.1 A media release was issued on 19 October 2022 to flag up the upcoming budget consultation. The release was featured on Wales Online on 21 October 2022.

A second media release was issued on 6 January 2023 on Wales Online to highlight that the budget consultation was open and to encourage people to have their say.

The Glamorgan Gazette featured a full media release on the budget consultation. The coverage was over half a page and was featured in the week's edition of 12 January 2023.

4.6.2 Internal communications – messages were included in staff bulletins to encourage staff to complete the budget consultation.

4.6.3 The business@bridgend monthly e-news is issued to 2,898 business subscribers in Bridgend County Borough and features top ten articles aimed at businesses. Two articles tailored specifically to the business community on the budget consultation were featured in the monthly business e-news during the consultation period. Details of these bulletins, including the email opens and link click stats can be found in the full consultation report, **Appendix A**.

4.7 **Promotional materials**

4.7.1 An explainer video was produced to help people understand what was being asked of them, with examples of questions that were included in the consultation. The video was featured on the webpage for the consultation.

4.7.2 Posters promoting the consultation including a QR code to take people to the landing page of the website were circulated at engagement drop in events. The poster included the topic areas of the budget consultation and the closing date, in both English and Welsh Language.

4.7.3 Three Infographics were produced including: 'How is my council tax spent', 'Breakdown of council funding' and 'The Council's budget'. These infographics were displayed at drop in events to provide people with further information and background of the Council's Budget consultation.

4.7.4 Targeted letters and emails were sent to school governing bodies, Halo, equality groups, elected members and Bridgend Community Cohesion and Equality Forum members.

4.7.5 Details of the consultation were sent to Halo who were asked to help raise the profile through their own organisations and social media channels.

4.8 **Headline figures**

It is important to note that whilst some results are shown below in this section of the report, not all results are listed in this covering report. However, all results of the consultation can be found in the full consultation report, **Appendix A**.

4.8.1 **Prioritising council services**

The top three responses to what services are important to our residents are: Street cleaning (768), Care for Older people and Disabled Adults (755) and Street/Road repairs (659).

The top three services that were viewed to not be a priority were: Improvements to council buildings (741), improving the council's website and online services (614), and Making the Council more commercial (573).

4.8.2 **Council Tax Levels**

There were a total of 1,046 responses on setting the council tax for 2023/24:

481 responses (46%) chose to keep council tax at the same level, which would result in a reduction in the level of services provided.

This was followed by 432 responses (41%) to increase council tax a bit to help protect the most important services, and 76 responses (7%) voted to increase council tax more significantly to protect more services.

57 responses were received (5%) in relation to increasing council tax by as much as is needed to maintain all council services at existing levels.

As well as the survey question, a quick poll was also included in the digital engagement platform to ask residents their opinion on the setting of council tax for 2023/2024. This generated 309 responses, with 54% choosing to "Keep council tax at the same level, which would result in a reduction in the level of services provided (because costs and demand are rising). Full details of this poll can be found in the full consultation report, **Appendix A**. 36% chose to 'Increase council tax a bit to help protect the most important services where possible'.

4.8.3 **Performance over the past 12 months**

A total of 956 responses were received as to how the Council has performed over the past 12 months. The majority of respondents (52%) chose "OK", when asked their thoughts on how BCBC have helped to support communities and individuals to create their own solutions and reduce dependence on the council. 38% chose "badly" or "very badly", with the remaining 95 (10%) respondents choosing "well" or "very well".

433 respondents (45%) selected either "badly" or "very badly" to how they think BCBC has worked as one Council in delivering services that they value in a timely and easy manner without the need to contact the council multiple times.

387 respondents (40%) chose 'OK', with the remaining 139 (15%) choosing 'well' or 'very well'.

4.8.4 Meeting our Fair, Ambitious, Citizen-focused and Efficient (FACE) Values

Out of a total of 990 responses, 428 (43%) respondents chose 'OK' as to how effective we have been in meeting the fairness element of the FACE values over the last 12 months, whilst only 13 (1%) responded 'very effective' to the efficient value. Full details of the responses against each of the FACE values can be found in the full consultation report, **Appendix A**.

4.8.5 Well-being Objectives

Out of a total of 1,028 responses, the majority of respondents (76%) stated that the council has not improved our town centres that make Bridgend County a great place to live, work and visit, improving the quality of life for citizens. This compared to 83 (8%) respondents who stated the council had improved our town centres with the remaining respondents being unsure.

Out of a total of 1,023 responses, 59% of respondents stated that the council has not helped to create conditions for growth and enterprise to make Bridgend County an attractive place to do business. This compared to 9% who stated the council had helped, with the remaining respondents (32%) being unsure.

4.8.6 Digitalisation of council services

Out of a total 1009 responses, 80% responded "Yes" to agreeing with the ongoing development of our online services. Out of a total of 985 responses 88% agreed that they intend to continue accessing services online.

Out of 989 responses, 80% would support the development of community hubs so those residents who choose not to access council services digitally can access these services within their local communities.

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 Medium Term Financial Strategy presented to Council in March 2023.

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.

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Background Documents: None