

Budget Review 2015

Consultation report

Date of issue: 21 November 2014

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1. Overview

A public consultation reviewing Bridgend County Borough Council's budget for the financial year 2015-16 was undertaken over a six week period from 6 October 2014 and 17 November 2014. The consultation received 443 responses from a combination of the consultation survey, six community workshops held across the county borough and an interactive online budget simulator. This paper details the analysis associated with the consultation.

2. Introduction

A public survey based on Bridgend County Borough Council's proposed budget reductions outlined in the Medium Term Financial Strategy 2015/16 was conducted over a six week period between 6 October and 17 November 2014. The survey was available to complete online through a link on the consultations page of the council's website¹. Paper copies of the consultation were also made available at local libraries, the six community engagement workshops, or alternatively, they could be sent directly to the residents upon request in either English or Welsh. The content of the page remains available online including an active link to the survey.

All questions in the survey were optional and all survey responses offered the option of anonymity. The council's standard set of equalities monitoring questions were also included with the survey, as is now recommended good practice for all public facing surveys carried out by the council.

Comments regarding the consultation were also invited via letter, email and phone call. Contact details were also provided for anyone wishing to receive a copy of the survey in another language or format.

3. Promotional tools and engagement methods

Details of the consultation were sent as part of a press release emailed to the following stakeholders; business forum and business directory, councillors, town and community councils, members of the Local Service Board (LSB), the Youth Service Cabinet (YSC), and Bridgend Equality Forum (BEF) and local media. Information on taking part in the budget consultation was also communicated on the customer service centre screens in the Civic Offices.

An informative letter/email (depending upon the recipient's preference) was sent to the 1,200 citizens' panel members on 13 October.

¹<http://www1.bridgend.gov.uk/services/consultation/hub/budget-review-2015.aspx>

3.1 Consultation document and survey

A consultation document featuring information on the consultation itself as well as an overview of Bridgend County Borough Council's medium term financial strategy and corporate plan 2013-17 were downloadable and available with the consultation questionnaire. Both documents were written in plain English to maximise potential inclusion.

3.2 Social media

The council tweeted its 4,700 @Bridgend CBC followers and posted to its 472 Facebook fans about the consultation on several occasions during the consultation period to help raise awareness.

A live Twitter Debate was held with Darren Mepham, Chief Executive on the 6 November held between 12-1pm. The event was promoted leading up to the debate to generate awareness and interest. During the debate, the Chief Executive opened the session by inviting questions which were themed around the council's budget consultation review. He also asked a range of budget related questions, as examples, to engage members of the public and stimulate a debate, such as should we introduce charging for black refuse bags and should we introduce a parking charge for blue badge holders in off street car parks?

3.3 Local press

The consultation was highlighted as a 'Wales first', and also featured in pages 1-2 of the Gazette newspaper on the 9 October 2014². Information on the budget also featured in members' columns in local publications.

A five week radio campaign on Bridge FM was undertaken to create awareness of the budget consultation and encourage members of the public to take part via the online survey and budget simulator, and/or attend a community engagement workshop. Bridge FM also placed a link on the front page of their website to the budget consultation document on the Bridgend County Borough Council website.

3.4 Member's budget workshop

36 of the 54 councillors attended the Member's budget workshop designed for councillors to experience using the budget simulator. Councillors were asked to work in groups of 8-12 to come to a consensus on saving the money required and the proposals regarding how the council can 'bring money in' and how the council could 'save money'.

²<https://www.facebook.com/glamorgangazette/photos/a.161168277229507.38531.161161663896835/869068873106107/?type=1&theater>

3.5 Online budget simulator

The budget simulator is an interactive tool designed to give respondents the ability to allocate the council's £255 million net annual budget. The simulator used sliders to allow respondents to alter individual service area budgets, which triggered positive and negative consequences designed to increase understanding of the impact of making changes to funding.

The simulator included an algorithm to only allow the respondent to move onto the next section of the simulator once the £12.4m (with council tax increasing by 4.8 per cent) had been met. Savings and income generation sections each presented eight proposals that would 'save money' and 'bring money in', which respondents were given the opportunity to agree with or disagree with. The final sections offered respondents the opportunity of making any additional suggestions and/or provide personal data.

3.6 Community engagement workshops

Six community engagement workshops were undertaken across Bridgend County Borough in: Coleg Cymunedol Y Dderwen (Ynysawdre), Maesteg Comprehensive, Pencoed Comprehensive, Bridgend College, Cynffig Comprehensive and the Grand Pavilion in Porthcawl. The events were all conducted between 18:00 – 19:30 and featured a participant worksheet which respondents were asked to complete and discuss. The participant worksheet followed a similar pattern to the online budget simulator allowing individuals to select to 'increase, maintain or decrease' the main service areas and the functions associated with these areas. The paper also asked respondents to say 'yes, no, or don't know' to the same 'bring money in' and 'save money' proposals included in the budget simulator. A qualitative section was also included for additional comments the attendees may have.

In preparation for the community engagement workshops two one-hour training sessions were conducted for 44 members of staff over lunch times. Staff were given an overview of the purpose of the budget consultation and community engagement workshops. The workshop structure and supporting documentation was also communicated with a clear explanation of what was required from facilitators. A presentation on the budget simulator was also communicated to staff and they were encouraged to try this tool out before attending workshops, so they understood the objective of both activities. This exercise helped to raise staff awareness of budgetary issues, and gave staff development opportunities in preparing for, and delivering the workshop.

4. Response rate

The response rate has been segregated into three areas: the consultation survey, the budget simulator and workshop worksheets received from attending one of the six community engagement events.

- 111 responses to the 'budget review 2015' consultation surveys were received in total by the closing date of Monday 17 November 2014 – all responses received were in English with 106 online submissions and 5 paper versions returned.
- 271 responses were received from the budget simulator directly – 95 of these can be directly attributed to the survey responses meaning there were 176 who went directly to the budget simulator.
- 61 responses were collated from attendees at the community engagement events across the county borough. In total there were 443 responses to the consultation.
- No comments were received by letter or telephone call.
- There were three responses from the budget simulator received after the closing date which unfortunately could not be included in this analysis.
- The consultation survey included an 'about you' section featuring two qualitative and six quantitative questions to gain a better understanding of the respondent. After a link to the budget simulator there were a further three quantitative questions, and three qualitative questions regarding the council's budget directly. The three qualitative budget questions received 72 (65 per cent), 61 (55 per cent) and 57 (51 per cent) responses overall.
- 71 attendees visited the community engagement workshops. The surveys gathered from the workshop questionnaires were designed as a paper version feature of the budget simulator, additionally an 'about you' section was also included which was taken from the consultation survey and finally a qualitative section for any other comments regarding the budget review giving the opportunity for respondents to answer in an open-ended format.

5. How effective was the consultation?

The budget consultation was conducted over a six week period in which a range of marketing methods were used to create awareness of the consultation and encourage members of the public to engage with the council. The social demographic data reflects a good cross section of the County Borough's population (359 respondents lived in Bridgend and 17 outside the area).

The use of analysis of the engagement activities shows that 86 per cent of all respondents completed the budget simulator. The use of the interactive budget simulator, in conjunction with the social media activities, were particularly successful in encouraging young people to engage, which can be seen in the table below:

Age	Participation worksheet data	Budget simulator data	Consultation survey data	Total
Under 18	0	1	0	1
18 - 24	0	11	5	16
25 - 34	0	41	25	66
35 - 44	2	59	29	90
45 - 54	10	46	20	76
55 - 64	12	36	16	64
65+	16	29	12	57
Prefer not to say	2	44	0	46
Grand Total	42	267	107	416

The data collection methods which include the online budget survey, the budget simulator and the workshop response forms, were all developed using plain English to increase understanding. These response methods were also designed to give respondents complete control in allocating funding, thus minimising any opportunity for bias or influence of responses.

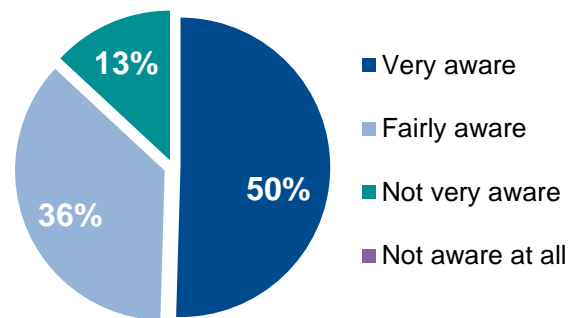
Data validation measures have been undertaken to ensure that the same respondent could not submit more than one response. This means the only opportunity for double counting exists from the budget simulator and workshops submissions. The budget consultations response size (443 responses) and methodology, indicates the survey results can be considered to be reliable and statistically valid.

The number of survey responses and attendees at the community engagement workshops was lower than expected and disappointing given the level of publicity that the events had been given. Generally, we experienced a notable indifference from members of the public, who openly stated that they believed that they were unable to influence council decisions. Those members of public who were willing to engage with us were in the main extremely positive about the opportunity to have their say, with a number of participants openly expressing their support and gratitude.

Many attendees stated they found the exercise valuable in terms of increasing their awareness and understanding of council services and the financial position we face, with 50 per cent stating they are aware of the current situation.

The vast majority of attendees found it extremely difficult to make any significant changes to service area budgets and there appeared to be a genuine appreciation of the very difficult decisions that have to be made.

Awareness levels of the council's current financial situation - consultation survey response.



6. Headline figures

- 6.1 All service areas received a reduction in their budget. The budget simulator data showed that the public thought that schools should receive the lowest reduction in funding at 3 per cent, and 'corporate functions' should receive the highest reduction with 30 per cent.
- 6.2 Three proposals for 'how we can bring money in' received more than 50 per cent 'yes' responses generating a potential income of £218,000. These were to:
 - Introduce a charge for pest control (58 per cent),
 - Introduce a parking charge for Blue Badge holders in our off-street car parks (58 per cent) and;
 - Introduce a percentage charge for credit card payments made to the council (55 per cent).
- 6.3 Delivering libraries and cultural services through a not for profit trust was the only money saving proposal to receive over 50 per cent 'yes' responses with 64 per cent. The proposal offers an estimated savings of £391,000.
- 6.4 Over one in three (36 per cent) believed that residents could help reduce demand on the council by taking more personal responsibility. This is an important issue that will need to be explored further in the deliberations on future service delivery.
- 6.5 39 per cent of respondents think the council could save money through removal or reduction in services currently provided by the council. Additionally, outsourcing or working with third parties where financially viable has been encouraged by respondents.
- 6.6 The feedback was consistent across all engagement methods. However, respondents in the community engagement workshops found it very difficult to decide how and where to cut main service area budgets after being given an overview of the service area. In direct contrast, respondents who completed the online survey and budget simulator made greater changes to main service area budgets.

7. Question and Analysis - Consultation Survey

Section seven of the report looks at the questions asked in the consultation survey – with 111 respondents in total.

7.1 How aware are you of the council's current financial situation?

Respondents to the consultation survey were initially asked how aware they were of the council's current financial situation. The perception was that exactly half (50 per cent) of the respondents believed they were "very aware" of the council's financial situation, and one in three 36 per cent felt they were "fairly aware". Out of the 107 responses to the question, no one answered "not aware at all" attributing the final 13 per cent to state they were "not very aware".

7.2 How would you like to be kept informed about the council's current financial situation?

This question was a multi-choice question where respondents had the opportunity to select from seven promotional options as well as opting to provide a specific response as 'other'. Two options accounted for more than 50 per cent of the communication methods requested by respondents. The council's website received 30 per cent of responses, followed by 23 per cent who would like to be kept informed through local publications. The only other option to receive over 10 per cent was social media site Facebook with 14 per cent of respondents selecting this option. Council publications twitter and local radio station Bridge FM all received 8 per cent.

7.3 With the council's current financial situation in mind, please tell us about your ideas for how the council could save money?

This qualitative question received the highest response rate for the three qualitative questions asked, with over six in ten (65 per cent) responding to the question. The answers have been segregated into several categories according to the answer, and are shown in the table alongside.

The top three categories account for over 70 per cent of how respondents believe the council could save money. These options are:

- Remove/reduce council services with 39 per cent,
- Restructure/internal changes with 19 per cent;
- Generating more income received 14 per cent.

How could the council save money?	Response
Remove/reduce council services	46
Restructure/internal changes	22
Generate money	16
Outsourcing	9
Investment	8
Alterations to planning and management	6
Encourage local business	5
Revert to statutory requirements	3
Volunteering/co-production	2
Realignment of service provision	1
Total	118

7.4 How do you think members of the public could reasonably help to reduce the demand on council services?

Following the methodology highlighted in section 1.3 of this paper with a response rate of 55 per cent the most popular option for how members of the public could help to reduce demand on council services was through citizens taking more responsibility, with 36 per cent of the responses highlighting this. Other notable categories were better resource management from the council with 16 per cent, less council hand-outs or reviewing means tested benefits with 15 per cent and finally outsourcing or encouraging third party adoption of services with 13 per cent.

7.5 Do you have any suggestions on how the council could create further income?

This question received the lowest response rate with only 51 per cent of respondents providing an answer to the question. One in four (25 per cent) stated an increase in charges for certain services or reducing the subsidies provided. Similarly to this, 12 per cent proposed reducing or bettering the efficiencies of the services that are currently provided. Almost one in five (17 per cent) mentioned the selling or renting of council owned assets.

Service area	Average Budget Alteration
Corporate functions	-30%
Resources	-14%
Legal and Regulatory	-13%
Communities	-10%
Sport, Play and Active Wellbeing	-6%
Children's (exc. Schools)	-6%
Adult Social Care	-6%
Schools	-3%

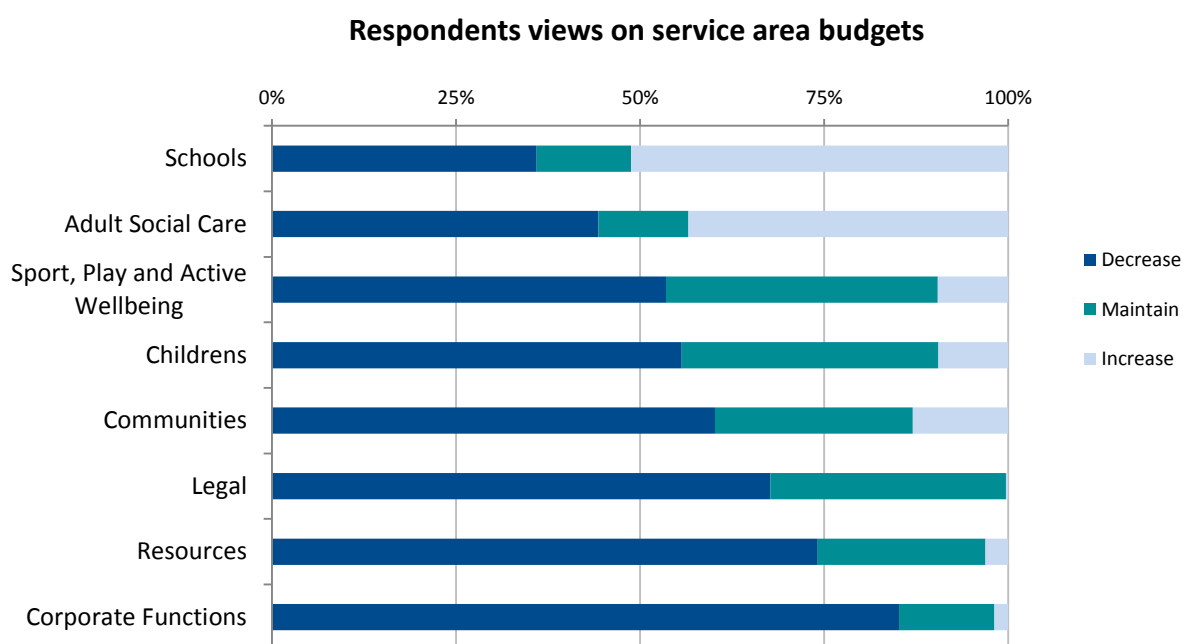
8. Question analysis – Budget Simulator and Workshop Worksheets

8.1 Budget overview

The budget overview looked directly at eight service areas: schools; children’s (excluding schools); adult social care; corporate functions; sport, play and active wellbeing; communities; resources and legal and regulatory services.

From the responses, schools and adult social care were both the least likely to be decreased, or maintained. Less than 50 per cent of respondents thought that these two service areas should receive any decrease in budget expenditure. Naturally this also means the two service areas were also the most likely to receive a budget rise with 51 per cent for schools and 43 per cent for adult social care.

Respondents were most likely to lower the corporate functions with 85 per cent reducing its budget. Followed by almost three in four (74 per cent) lowering the resources budget. Sport, play and active wellbeing, communities and legal were the most likely to maintain their current budget with 37 per cent, 35 per cent and 32 per cent respectively.

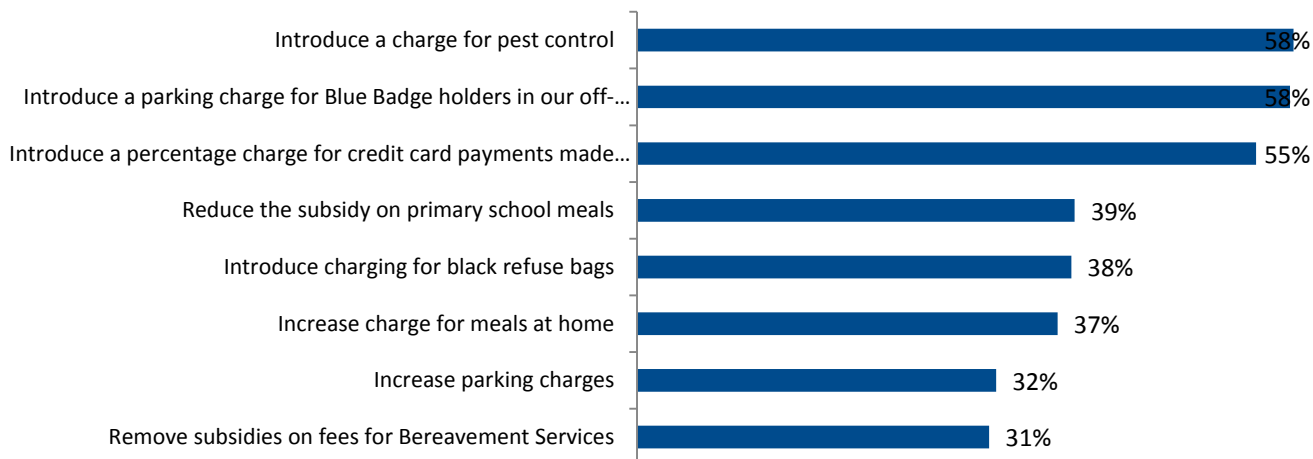


In summary, all budgets were reduced. This meant that although schools and adult social care saw some respondents increasing those budgets, due to the decreases made by other respondents, these budgets reduced on average. The biggest average budget reduction was corporate functions by far, receiving a total decrease of 30 per cent from its current budget allowance. Resources and Legal and Regulatory Services received 14 per cent and 13 per cent reductions respectively. The table above shows that schools received the lowest budget alteration with a 3 per cent decrease overall.

8.2 How we can bring money in

This question was asked in both the budget simulator and in the workshop worksheets. For the eight proposals put forward for how the council can bring money in there were three options available, 'Yes, no and don't know'. The budget simulator was based upon the assumption that if the respondent did not answer yes, then the proposal is automatically presumed to answer no. This theory was also used in calculating the workshop worksheet responses in the interest of consistency. The eight proposals offered a total estimated saving of £622,000.

Percentage of 'yes' responses for income generation proposals



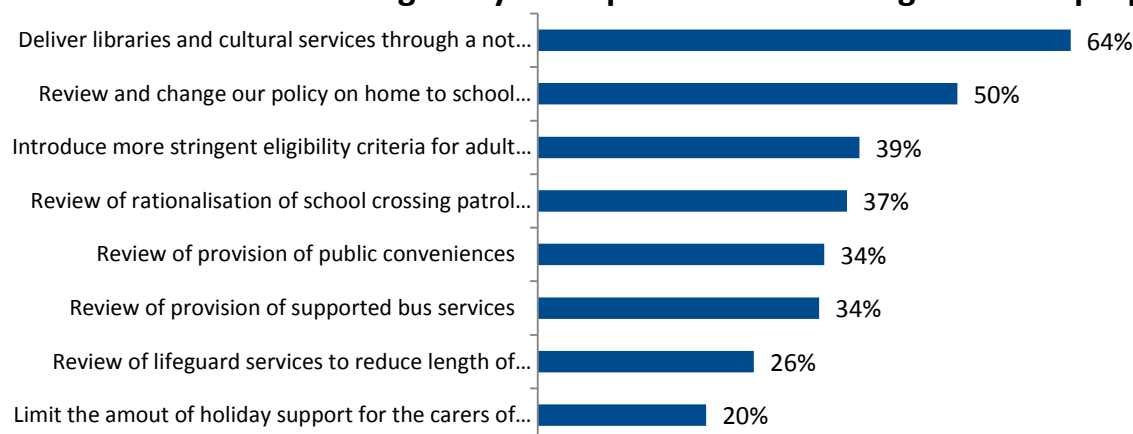
The graph above shows that three proposals received a majority 'yes' vote in ways in which the council could generate additional income. Introducing a charge for pest control and introducing a parking charge for Blue Badge holders in our off-street car parks both received 58 per cent 'yes' votes collectively from workshop respondents and budget simulator respondents. Introducing a percentage charge for credit card payments made to the Council received 55 per cent 'yes' votes. These three proposals would generate estimated revenue of £218,000. An increased charge for meals at home received a lower 'yes' response of almost one in four (37 per cent) but does offer the second largest proposed saving of £122,000 in itself.

8.3 How we can save money

Section three focused on how the council could save money with eight proposals. The potential savings came to a total of £3,908,000. The respondents had the opportunity to select between 'yes', 'no' or 'don't know' to each proposal.

Only one proposal from section three received over 50 per cent of 'yes' responses. Delivering libraries and cultural services through a not for profit trust received a 64 per cent 'yes' response and offered estimated savings of £391,000. The review and change to the home to school transport received 50 per cent 'yes' response rate. This offers the second highest potential saving with £550,000.

Percentage of 'yes' responses for income generation proposals



The highest potential saving came from introducing 'more stringent eligibility criteria for adult social services' with a potential saving of £2,550,000. This proposal received a 'yes' response of 39 per cent.

8.4 Service area budgets

Section four gave the respondents the ability to further analyse and take a view on individual parts of each of the service areas, apart from corporate functions and schools. The workshop worksheet followed the 'increase', 'maintain', and 'decrease' for continuity based on section one.

From the six service areas with additional detail, the resources service area received the highest amount of respondents identifying an area of potential savings with 66 per cent of respondents decreasing the budget on average, followed by legal and regulatory with 58 per cent and communities with 56 per cent.

By analysing the budget simulator data alone further information can be derived. For instance, although more respondents decreased the resources budget, there were slightly higher cuts to the legal and regulatory budget. On average both service areas received 14 per cent budget cuts, with Sport, Play and Active Wellbeing receiving cuts of 11 per cent and Communities receiving cuts of 10 per cent. Similarly to section one, adult social care was one of the least financially affected service areas however, there was still an average reduction in its budget of 6 per cent, and children's also received a reduction of 6 per cent.

8.41 Children's (excluding schools)

The service area for children's had seven adjustable budgets. No budget area had more than 50 per cent of respondents suggesting that the budget should be reduced. Data collated from the budget simulator specifically showed that 'school improvements and support' received the highest levels of reduction with an average of 8 per cent cut, and special needs receiving both the lowest volume of respondents at 4 per cent reduction..

8.42 Adult social care

Adult social care featured eight additional options in section four of the budget simulator and workshop worksheet.

'Service management and administration' received a decrease from more than half (51 per cent) of the respondents. The budget simulator data reveals that it was also the highest cut with an average reduction of 8 per cent. Similarly, substance misuse services received a 7 per cent cut overall. Four options received an equal reduction of 5 per cent – these were: homecare, aids and adaptations at home, residential care and meals at home.

8.43 Sport, play and active wellbeing

The service area for sport, play and active wellbeing had only two additional options. Sport and physical activity attracted a higher percentage decrease (12 per cent) compared to beach and water safety's 9 per cent.

8.44 Communities

Five options in the consultation form the communities' service area received a reduction from over half of the respondents. The percentage of the cuts did vary, with only three of the options totalling more than 10 per cent of the current budget. Culture received the highest reduction with 13 per cent, community business unit followed with 11 per cent and finally, elections received a 10 per cent budget reduction.

8.45 Resources

The service area for resources received the second highest average reduction with 14 per cent between the four options available. Support services received the second highest reduction rate in section four with a suggested 16 per cent. Customer services also received a high reduction with 14 per cent. Over six in ten made reductions to this area, making it on average the most reduced service area in section four.

8.46 Legal and regulatory services

Legal and regulatory services received the highest volume of reduction responses on average and also received the highest average reduction (17 per cent) on 'democratic services'. All areas received a minimum of 11 per cent average reduction from the budget simulator. However, slightly less chose to make a reduction to this area in direct comparison to resources.

8.5 Qualitative Data - Budget Simulator and Participant Worksheets

Respondents made a number of suggestions and comments which developed in a number of key themes which are outlined in the table below:

Key Themes	No. of Responses	% of Respondents
Restructure/internal changes	49	21.7%
Remove/reduce council services	43	19.0%
Outsourcing	29	12.8%
Alterations to planning and management	27	11.9%
Generate money	21	9.3%
Revert to statutory requirements	19	8.4%
Encourage economic development	13	5.8%
Realignment of service provision	12	5.3%
Investment	9	4.0%
Citizen responsibility	4	1.8%
Total	226	100.0%

Over a fifth of all budget simulator suggestions (21.7%) related to restructuring the council or making internal changes to make the council operate more efficiently. Examples of these comments included “Merge Councils”, “Move more control to town councils”, “Make sure Councillors are time efficient” and “Limit the number of Councillors and/or the expenses they can claim”.

19 per cent of all respondents suggested making specific reductions to service areas or removing some services altogether. Examples include “Remove rubbish bags”, “Reduce refuse collection”, “Reduce corporate spending”, “Remove Library services” and Reduce demand through early intervention”.

Many respondents demonstrated they were aware of the consequences of making such decisions and acknowledged how difficult the process was. Examples of this includes “Whilst the choices I have made are regrettable I believe they will minimise the impact on the public”. “Having completed this exercise demonstrates what a difficult task members have in achieving their budgetary targets. Clearly they are in a no win situation!”

12 per cent of respondents suggested outsourcing services as a way of saving money because they felt they could be offered more cost effectively by third parties. Examples of comments include “Outsource the parks and playing fields”, “Outsource all non-essential services”, and “Promote 3rd parties that support council functions”.

Other significant themes that were suggested by a number of respondents include:

- Revert to statutory levels of service
“Focus on essential services”, “Removal all subsidies” and “Charge for or reduced non-essential services”.
- Encourage economic development
“Encourage local businesses which will create job opportunities” and “Charge for services the council can provide”.
- Investment to improve Infrastructure
“Use technology where appropriate”, Improve transport infrastructure” and “Utilise online facilities”
- Encourage citizens to take responsibility
“Increase community pride and responsibility”; “Citizen Responsibility – litter”; Citizen Responsibility – graffiti”; and “Encourage healthier lifestyles”.

9. Conclusion

The budget consultation response size (443 responses) and methodology, indicates the survey results can be considered to be reliable and statistically valid. Consistent feedback was received across all engagement methods; however the budget simulator and social media communication increased the level of engagement with young people.

The budget consultation showed that 50 per cent of participants believed they were very aware of the current financial situation. In being asked how respondents would manage the budget all services received a minimum reduction of three per cent. The service area responses showed that 85 per cent of respondents reduced Corporate Functions by an average 30 per cent. 74 per cent of respondents reduced Resources by 14 per cent. 68 per cent of people reduced Legal and Regulatory services by 13 per cent. 54 per cent of respondents reduced Sport, Play and Active Wellbeing by 6 per cent.

Schools and Adult Social Care were both the least likely to be decreased or maintained. The two service areas were the only areas to receive any decrease in budget expenditure from less than 50 per cent of the respondents. Naturally this also means the two service areas were also the most likely to receive a budget rise with 51 per cent suggesting an increase for schools and 43 per cent an increase for adult social care.

The response to income generation proposals showed that 58 per cent voted 'yes' to an introducing a charge for pest control. 58 per cent voted yes to introducing a parking charge for Blue Badge holders in our off-street car parks. 55 per cent voted yes to introducing a percentage charge for credit card payments made to the council. Based on the research findings it is suggested that the above proposals could be implemented with the support of the majority of the respondents, generating a potential income of £218,000.

The response we received to savings proposals showed that 64 per cent of respondents voted 'yes' to delivering libraries and cultural services through a not for profit trust. This was the most supported proposal, offering a potential saving of £391,000. A review to the home to school transport received a split 50:50 response rate between yes and no, this is currently under public consultation which closes 22 December 2014. The associated saving is estimated to be £550,000.

Over one in three (36 per cent) believed that residents could help reduce demand on the council by taking more personal responsibility. This is also supported by other respondents suggesting a need for third party and/or voluntary/co-production collaboration and engagement.

10. Appendices

Online Response.....	Appendix 1
Budget Simulator Responses.....	Appendix 2
Community Engagement Workshop.....	Appendix 3
Social Media Information Report.....	Appendix 4
Equality Impact Assessment.....	Appendix 5
Social Media Management Report.....	Appendix 6

Please Note:

All appendices have been communicated to Bridgend County Borough Council Cabinet Members.

Electronic copies of appendices are available to members of the public on request from:

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