

Meeting of:	CABINET
Date of Meeting:	20 FEBRUARY 2024
Report Title:	OUTCOME OF THE CONSULTATION 'SHAPING BRIDGEND'S FUTURE' 2024
Report Owner / Corporate Director:	CHIEF OFFICER - FINANCE, HOUSING AND CHANGE
Responsible Officer:	ZOE EDWARDS - CONSULTATION, ENGAGEMENT AND EQUALITIES MANAGER
Policy Framework and Procedure Rules:	There is no impact on the policy framework or procedure rules.
Executive Summary:	To inform Cabinet of the outcome of the 'Shaping Bridgend's Future' 2024 budget consultation. The consultation was undertaken over a three-week period from 15th January 2024 to 4th February 2024 and received 2,839 responses.

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to inform Cabinet of the outcome of the 'Shaping Bridgend's Future' 2024 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. Background

- 2.1 Budget planning for the financial year 2024-25 is more uncertain than ever before. Bridgend County Borough Council has been through an extraordinary period in recent years, with the lasting effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, followed by significant economic turbulence, a cost-of-living crisis, and international and national crises.
- 2.2 The Council faces an unprecedented financial challenge over the coming years, and had an estimated funding gap of around £16m for the 2024-25 financial year at the time the draft budget was published.

- 2.3 Due to the financial pressures placed on many of our services last year, such as social care and Home to School Transport, there was an overspend in our service budgets and these pressures have increased in this financial year.
- 2.4 Bridgend County Borough Council is set to receive a 2024-25 budget settlement increase of just 3 per cent from Welsh Government which has led the authority to warn that it is now impossible to avoid major changes for some council services.
- 2.5 A public consultation exercise was undertaken over a three-week period from 15th January 2024 to 4th February 2024. Respondents were asked to share their views and priorities across the following areas:
- Budget Principles
 - Reduce / close services.
 - Increasing charges and introducing new charges
 - Review services and related budgets
 - Review use of assets/buildings
 - Review contracts with external partners for leisure services
 - Review agreements with external partners
 - Council Tax
 - Citizen Focused
- 2.6 Budget consultation exercises have been undertaken annually since 2013-14. The 'Shaping Bridgend's Future' 2024-2025 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, social media, face-to-face drop-in sessions, as well as an explainer video, and media releases.
- 2.7 The public survey was available to complete online through a link on the consultation page of the council's website or by visiting www.bridgend.gov.uk/future. Paper copies of the consultation were also made available which could be sent directly to residents upon request. Surveys were available in several formats, including easy-read, large print, standard and a youth version. All were available in Welsh and English.
- 2.8 Respondents could choose to answer all or some questions. All survey responses offered the option of anonymity. The council's standard set of equality monitoring questions were also included within the survey, in line with recommended good practice for all public-facing surveys carried out by the council.
- 2.9 The consultation aimed to reach the following key stakeholders: general public/residents, Citizens' Panel 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.
- 2.10 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, direct

marketing to key target audiences e.g. businesses, schools, youth council and internal communications for staff and elected members.

3. Current situation / proposal

3.1 The attached consultation report (**Appendix A**) sets out in detail the views expressed by those who participated.

3.2 Overall the consultation received **2,839** interactions from a combination of survey completions following attendance at engagement events (face-to-face drop-in sessions), social media engagement and via the Council's Citizens' Panel.

3.3 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, Bridgend Community Cohesion and Equality Forum (BCCEF) members.

3.4 Social Media

The council currently has **14,766** followers on its English Twitter account and **373** on its Welsh Twitter account; **20,087** followers on its English Facebook page and **262** on the Welsh Facebook page; **3,335** followers on Instagram and **7,298** followers on LinkedIn and **209** subscribers on YouTube. Details of the success of the social media and website campaigns can be found in the full consultation report at **Appendix A**.

3.5 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 35,143 English language and 283 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, more detail of which can be found in Appendix A.'

3.6 Media and publicity

3.6.1 A media release was issued on 15th January 2024 to flag up the upcoming budget consultation.

A link to the consultation was included in the Medium Term Financial Strategy press release on 18th January 2024 to encourage people to have their say.

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

3.7 Promotional materials

- 3.7.1 An explainer video was produced to help people understand how the council's budget works and the challenges it faces. The video was featured on the webpage for the consultation.
- 3.7.2 The consultation team held two engagement events during the consultation period at Garw Valley Life Centre and Ogmore Valley Life Centre. Business cards with links to the online survey were given out to encourage participation.
- 3.7.3 Targeted letters and emails were sent to Town and community councils, equality groups and Bridgend Community Cohesion and Equality Forum members.

3.8 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 at **Appendix A**.

3.8.1 Budget Principles

81% (2267) of respondents agree with the budget principles, and 19% (533) disagree with the principles.

3.8.2 Cost recovery model for services

60% of respondents (1687) agree that moving towards a full cost recovery model for services is the right approach. 40% of respondents (1116) do not think it is the correct approach.

3.8.3 Remodelling services

80.5% (2248) of respondents think that reviewing and remodelling services is an important consideration. 19.5% (543) of respondents do not think it is an important consideration.

3.8.4 Review of assets and buildings

95.5% of respondents (2674) agree that reviewing the use of assets/buildings is the right approach. 4.5% of respondents (126) do not think this is the right approach to have a meaningful impact.

3.8.5 Council Tax

64.4% of respondents favour keeping council as low as possible even though this would mean reducing or stopping more services. 29.9% of respondents (834) agree that the proposed 9.5% council tax is needed to protect services and proposed reductions will have to be implemented.

5.7% of respondents (160) agree to increasing council tax by more than 9.5% in order to protect as many council services as possible.

4. Equality implications (including Socio-economic Duty and Welsh Language)

- 4.1 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 Equality Impact assessment 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.

5. Well-being of Future Generations implications and connection to Corporate Well-being Objectives

- 5.1 The well-being goals identified in the Act were considered in the preparation of this report. It is considered that there will be no significant or unacceptable impacts upon the achievement of well-being goals/objectives as a result of this report.

6. Climate Change Implications

- 6.1 There are no Climate Change Implications from this report.

7. Safeguarding and Corporate Parent Implications

- 7.1 There are no Safeguarding and Corporate Parent Implications from this report.

8. Financial Implications

- 8.1 The costs of carrying out the consultation were met from existing budgets. The outcome of the consultation will inform the final Medium Term Financial Strategy proposals.

9. Recommendation

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

Background documents

None