

Meeting of:	CABINET
Date of Meeting:	18 FEBRUARY 2025
Report Title:	OUTCOME OF THE CONSULTATION 'TIME TO TALK BUDGET 2025'
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 'Time to Talk Budget 2025' consultation. The consultation was undertaken over a three-week period from 6th January 2025 to 26th January 2025 and received 1,637 responses.

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to inform Cabinet of the outcome of the 'Time to Talk Budget 2025' 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.

2. Background

- 2.1 Budget planning for the financial year 2025-26 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, international and national crises and changing global geo-political influences.
- 2.2 The money we use to pay for services comes mainly from an annual Welsh Government budget settlement as well as council tax and income generated via fees and charges.
- 2.3 For 2025-26, the council is set to receive a budget settlement increase of 4 per cent. Unfortunately, this will not be enough to deal with increased costs and higher

demand for services.

- 2.4 In order to set the fully balanced budget required by law, at the time of the consultation the Council needed to identify savings of £9.1m in 2025-26.
- 2.5 A public consultation exercise was undertaken over a three-week period from 6th January 2025 to 26th January 2025. Respondents were asked to share their views and priorities across the following areas:
- Budget awareness campaigns
 - Reducing/removing services
 - Council tax
 - Citizen Focus
 - Residents' suggestions
- 2.6 Budget consultation exercises have been undertaken annually since 2013-14. The 'Time to Talk Budget 2025' consultation exercise has built on our previous approaches to the budget consultation and include a wide variety of methods to reach people including using our dedicated participation platform Engagement HQ, consulting directly with our Citizens' Panel, promoting the consultation widely through social media channels as well as through 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/consultations. Paper copies of the consultation were also made available at all libraries and could be sent directly to residents upon request. Surveys were available in several formats, including easy-read, large print and standard. 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 consultation 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.
- 2.10 The consultation was supported by a full communications and social media campaign. The main activities included media releases, various press release/editorials in the media, a social media/web campaign, direct marketing via Facebook adverts.

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 **1,637** interactions from a combination of survey completions, social media engagement and via the council's Citizens' Panel.

3.3 **Marketing and engagement methods**

Prior to the consultation a budget awareness campaign was run on the council's social media channels during October-December 2024 highlighting key facts about the council's budget and budget setting process. This was a precursor to the budget consultation and aimed to promote awareness of how the council's budget is set and allocated.

Details of the consultation itself were shared with the following stakeholders: general public/residents, Citizens' Panel members, elected members, council employees, businesses, Bridgend Business Forum members, local media and town councils.

3.4 **Social Media**

The council currently has **14,515** followers on its English Twitter account and **384** on its Welsh Twitter account, **21,457** followers on its English Facebook page and **279** on the Welsh Facebook page, **3,526** followers on Instagram and **8,320** followers on LinkedIn and **242** subscribers on YouTube. Social media posts about the consultation were issued regularly throughout the campaign. Details 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 33,837 English language and 318 Welsh language users who have subscribed to receive the council's weekly update emails.

The 'Time to Talk Budget' consultation was included in the Residents' Bulletin, more detail of which can be found in **Appendix A**.

3.6 **Media and publicity**

3.6.1 A press release promoting the launch of the consultation was issued on 10th January 2025 and the consultation was also referenced in a budget related press release on 14th January 2025. Regular reminders of the survey were also included in our weekly news round-up on three occasions.

3.6.2 Within the council messages were included in staff bulletins to encourage staff to complete the budget consultation.

3.7 **Promotional materials**

3.7.1 An explainer webpage was produced to help people understand how the council's budget works and the challenges it faces: <https://www.bridgend.gov.uk/news/time-to-talk-budget-2025/>. During the Autumn we promoted a budget awareness campaign (see 3.3 above) and, at the beginning of December 2024, we ran a quick poll for a two-week duration asking residents if we should protect as many services as possible by increasing council tax.

3.7.2 All libraries and life centres were provided with a poster to promote the survey. The poster included a link to the consultation page and also advised that paper copies were available to complete with a member of staff on site.

3.8 **Headline figures**

3.8.1 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**.

3.8.2 **Budget awareness campaigns**

38.4% of respondents had seen our budget awareness campaign and budget-related infographics, which had been shared on our social media channels, website and in our weekly emails to residents. The majority were seen via Facebook, via the Council's website and through the Residents' bulletin.

3.8.3 **Reducing removing services**

The top five service areas people supported to cut are: achieving our 2030 Net Zero pledge, concessionary pricing and discounted rates for leisure, review of CCTV provision, improving school attendance and provision of library services.

The service areas that people feel should not be cut are: Protection of children and young people (773), Funding for schools (712), Maintaining highways and road surfaces (667), and protection of vulnerable adults

3.8.4 **Council Tax**

Taking account of the level of savings proposed, which of the following statements would residents support, the results were as follows:

- 45.4% of respondents wanted to keep council tax as low as possible even though this would mean more services being reduced or stopped;
- 28.2% of respondents agreed that the proposed 4.5% council tax increase is needed to protect services, acknowledging that the proposed reductions will have to be implemented;
- 18.2% of respondents wanted to increase council tax by 5.5% to protect education services and avoid reductions to school budgets;
- 8.2% of respondents wanted to increase council tax by more than 5.5% to protect as many other 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 consultation report attached at **Appendix A**

Background documents

None