

BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO CABINET

15 DECEMBER 2015

REPORT OF THE CORPORATE DIRECTOR RESOURCES

OUTCOME OF THE CONSULTATION 'SHAPING BRIDGEND'S FUTURE'

1.0 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to inform Cabinet of the outcome of the 'Shaping Bridgend's Future' consultation which asked citizens to share their views on the council's corporate priorities and on a number of key budget proposals being considered over the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) period.
- 1.2 This report provides an overview of the budget consultation activities, analysis and key findings.

2.0 Connection to Corporate Improvement Objectives / Other Corporate Priorities

- 2.1 The 'Shaping Bridgend's Future' consultation sought to obtain views on a revised set of corporate priorities as well as specific budget reduction proposals across council directorates. In addition the allocation of financial resources determines the council's ability to meet its corporate objectives. As such the report links to all corporate priorities.
- 2.2 Decisions on the MTFS will influence the extent to which the council can deliver against its corporate priorities.

3.0 Background

- 3.1 Over the next four years Bridgend County Borough Council is expecting to have to make budget reductions of up to £50 million. Despite the financial challenges ahead, the council is determined to deliver its vision of working together to improve lives across the county borough.
- 3.2 In addition to questions on the proposed corporate priorities, respondents were also asked, using budget sliders, to share their views on 12 key budget proposals being considered between 2016-17 and 2019-20, including: nursery services; residential and respite care; complex homecare support; lifeguard services; holiday support for people with a learning difficulty; highways maintenance and direct labour; reduction of supported bus services; looked after children; regeneration; cleaning service; parks and open spaces and online services.
- 3.3 Budget consultation exercises were undertaken in 2013/14 and 2014/15. This 'Shaping Bridgend's Future' consultation exercise has built on the knowledge gained from the previous two consultations and further developed the consultation to include new ways for people to participate and engage with the council.

- 3.4 The budget consultation overview, document and survey was made available between 28 September 2015 and 22 November 2015. The survey was available to complete online through a link on the council's website or by visiting: www.bridgend.gov.uk/future
- 3.5 The consultation aimed to reach the following key stakeholders: citizens, schools, BCBC cabinet members/councillors, local businesses, the third sector, BCBC staff, trade unions, town and community councils, partner organisations, equality groups, youth services/council and local media.
- 3.6 Communication and promotional activities included a radio campaign with Bridge FM, various press release/editorials in the Gazette and other local media, a social media/web campaign, development of three short films, poster/sign campaign, direct marketing to key target audiences e.g. businesses, youth council, internal communications campaign for staff and elected members.
- 3.7 Methods of engagement included a survey (available online and hard copy at all local libraries), engagement events and town centre engagement stands, social media debates, a dedicated Citizen's Panel survey, meetings with representative groups e.g. Bridgend Association of Secondary Heads.

As part of the engagement and town centre events, citizens could also fill in comment cards and take part in a coin game to prioritise budget proposals.

Responses were also welcome via letter, email or telephone.

- 3.8 A target was set for this consultation exercise of 1400 responses to represent c.1% of the population of Bridgend County Borough.

4.0 Current Situation / proposal

- 4.1 The attached consultation report (appendix 1) sets out in detail the views expressed by those who participated.
- 4.2 Overall, the council has received 1819 responses via the various consultation mechanisms identified in 3.7. A breakdown of these is documented in the consultation report.
- 4.3 The response rate can be summarised as:
- 989 responses to the surveys were received in total including responses gathered through the Citizens' Panel outlet – of the responses received there were 753 online submissions and 204 paper versions returned. The remaining 32 responses were received from the community engagement events.
 - Of the 989 responses, 424 surveys were received directly from the Citizens' Panel – 220 were received online and 204 paper versions.
 - In total, there were 495 interactions at the public community engagement events across the county borough. This figure is a combination of 167 comment cards and 247 counter game interactions received at the engagement stands and 81 from attendees at engagement workshops.
 - During two social media question and answer sessions there were a total of 167 interactions from Twitter and 85 interactions from Facebook, being seen a total of

79,861 times on Twitter and 49,811 times on Facebook respectively. During the consultation period there were a total of 334 interactions using social media.

- No comments were received by letter, email or telephone call.

4.4 Headline figures and themes include:

- All three proposed corporate priorities received strong support, with at least 80 per cent of respondents agreeing. 71 per cent however, believed the priorities are also missing important factors. Streamline the council; workforce and processes (39 responses), public transport, highways and infrastructure improvements (27 responses), and support local businesses and offer free parking (23 responses) were the three most suggested themes put forward by respondents.
- There was minority support for increasing council tax in order to keep services running (only 31% agreed). Providing some council services through other organisations (76%), focusing services on the vulnerable (65%) and introducing charges to maintain some services (52%) all received support from the majority of respondents.
- The majority (68%) believe schools should be expected to make efficiency savings. However, 73 per cent believe some services should be protected over others. In particular, care of older people, services for disabled people and primary schools were the three most popular areas to protect.
- 11 of the 12 budget proposals were supported by the majority of respondents. Online services were the most popular – a combination of 87 per cent either agreed with the proposal or chose to increase the proposed reduction. Highway maintenance was the least supported proposal with 48 per cent either agreeing with the proposal or increasing the proposed reduction.
- There was a high level of consistency when respondents chose to reduce/(increase) specific proposals. The most common alternative was to cut elsewhere/(spend elsewhere), followed by increasing/(lowering) council tax.

4.5 Report conclusions

4.5.1 The overall response rate is very positive, exceeding the target of 1,400 set. In comparison we have received 1338 more interactions than the previous year's combined responses (survey, simulator, event attendance and social media replies) Direct comparisons:

- Survey completions (general and Citizens' Panel) of 989 this year compared with 382 last year across both the separate survey and budget simulator;
- Social media replies/comments of 334 this year compared to 28 last year (It is important to note this year's results cover the whole consultation period not just the actual debate as we did last year);
- Event attendance of 81 this year compared to 71 last year (across six events)

Survey completions are able to measure demographic information which allows us to understand which stakeholders have engaged with us. Key statistics are:

Age	Number
Under 18	35
18 – 24	25
25 – 34	82
35 – 44	154
45 – 54	185
55 – 64	181
65+	202
Prefer not to say	64
Total	884

4.5.2 The majority of respondents responding very positively to budget consultation, with the proposed three new priorities receiving strong support. There was strong support for protecting some budgets over others, and of the 12 budget proposals, 11 received majority support, and the least supported received 48%

4.5.3 The least support was to raise council tax to protect services, which received a positive response from 31%. In addition, the consultation has identified some additional priorities for consideration which are set out in paragraph 4.4 above.

4.5.4 Electronic methods such as online survey, films and social media have received larger levels of engagement and interaction compared to more traditional methods such as events and paper-based surveys. The evening engagement events on the whole continued to receive poor attendance, however the introduction, this year, of the engagement stands in town centres has proved successful. Other local authorities have better attendance at evening engagement events so there is a need to review the differences and pro-actively respond to that for next year as well as build on the success of the social media debates.

5.0 Effect upon Policy Framework and Procedure Rules

5.1 There are no proposed changes to the policy framework and procedure rules.

6.0 Equality Impact Assessment

6.1 An Equality Impact Assessment has been carried out and no equality issues have been identified. Budget reduction proposals pursued will be subject to the appropriate equality impact assessment prior to implementation. .

7.0 Financial Implications

7.1 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.

8.0 Recommendation

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

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15 December 2015**

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Appendix 1: Shaping Bridgend's Future Consultation Report

Background Documents

None