

Annex 4a: Budget Consultation January/February 2023

Notes from library engagements

Rhymney

Spoke to 3 people in the library.

- One returned the survey (F, 50+),
- One took the survey home with them (F, 50+)
- One gave details to join the Viewpoint Panel and said they would complete the survey online (M, 50+)

Visited the “Cwtsh” coffee morning at St David’s Community Centre. Around 20 people were in attendance (50+ F plus one 50+ M). Talked through key elements of proposal. Left copies of the survey to be returned to library. They noted that they were missing the library as their usual venue – more cosy (refurbishment work currently taking place in the library).

Generally not happy with the proposed council tax increase, expressed the view that there is nothing in Rhymney so why should they pay more council tax. Re increase in charges to leisure centre – we don’t have a leisure centre anyway and you’re spending money building a new one in Caerphilly.

Key message – disagree with proposed council tax increase. Feel that there is not enough investment in the north of the borough.

Blackwood

One Councillor attended (Argoed Ward) with concerns re Markham Community Centre

4 people took a look at the information and took a copy of the survey with them.

Rail link – person uses this service to catch train to Cardiff and would now have to take the car

Mentioned reduction in book fund – no real concerns as a one off – but said how good the libraries are and how important they are to people – don’t close libraries.

Spoke to the Knit and Natter group (10 x 50+ F) outlined proposals and chatted with the group. Main points raised were issues with food waste – which were passed on to the team for a response.

- Why don’t CCBC give away green compostable bags for the food caddy? Other neighbouring local authorities provide them. Why can’t we recycle brown paper (as per sticker inside recycling bin)
- Example – Penllwyn, green waste not taken because it’s not in a bag, Croespenmaen, when food waste was collected, the bag split and was left on the floor.

Re the proposals

Rail link – this also takes people to the retail park – there is no other service that does that. More widely, public transport is a big issue – difficult to get to leisure centres and other council services. Isolating people who cannot drive/don’t own a car.

Agree with income generation (selling felled logs etc) but not if it means charging residents – especially at the moment

Bulky waste collection – complicated process, no phone number on web page, the charges are high (helped one lady find the information on the website and gave her the general customer services number)

Key messages -the use of reserves is good (it should be more). The increase in council tax is too high. Disagree with removal of rail link (in the context of poor public transport provision generally). Agree with the generation of income but not increasing charges to residents

Nelson

Spoke to 4 people (50+ F) two had attended the What Matters sessions before Christmas

Use extra reserves to not have to put up the Council tax – don't need to make extra savings then

No increase is acceptable at this time

Resident suggested that the Council can save money by – a review of sick leave policy to reduce absenteeism, not appoint the two new senior posts

Those who are ok with CT increase are those who can afford it

Felt that the council hasn't done enough to make things more transparent – WHY can't we use more reserves? If I knew, maybe I'd understand why we can't use it

Reserves – use more now – if there are any projects that can be delayed, non-essential - put them back and use more reserves.

Mitigate the crisis not compound it by increasing 7.9% - This is what reserves are for

People need help – in work poverty – fall through the net

Fairness in society – and this is unfair

Both happy with the refuse collections

Council don't take any notice of what residents say anyway

Want more senior officers here at the consultation sessions

The key message was that no increase in Council Tax is acceptable at this time, more money should be used from the reserves. More information on what reserves are used for may help change view.

Caerphilly

4 people attended (2 x 50+ F. 1 50+ M and 1 younger F)

2 came to report specific issues around on street parking, road safety, litter (outside school) and need for grit bins. Requests sent to CRM not directly budget related but generally no issues with proposals. Understood current financial climate, use of reserves was a good idea.

One person – pleased with the investment in leisure centre, disappointed re the interchange (accessibility point of view)

One person said he hoped that Caerphilly town wouldn't become more run down – needs investment (pleased re the market, new leisure centre) but need to encourage shops to high street – felt council tax increase was a bit high

Key messages – the use of reserves is good, council tax increase should be lower, no real concerns with proposals, makes sense to generate income (felled logs, always used to charge for tennis courts years ago etc)

Risca

7 people attended – including the chair of the community council.

One person came to report a specific issue around flooding/to find out more information about flood alleviation schemes to prevent flooding in future. Request sent to Infrastructure division. Discussion was not directly budget related but resident took a survey away to complete.

General discussions around the budget and the several ways the council is looking to balance the books. General agreement all round with the use of reserves, but thought that given the climate currently, greater amounts of reserves should be used.

One person was a former head teacher and was particularly keen to learn more about any proposals that would impact upon schools – such as school crossing patrols, energy costs and maintenance budgets for schools.

There was discussion around the community empowerment fund and the importance of maintaining this so that community groups can deliver projects locally. There was also a consensus that where we can, the council should look to generate more income (through felled timber etc).

Discussions emphasised that there is a general feeling that Risca is 'forgotten' compared to the Caerphilly basin and that residents would like to see more investment in this part of the borough.

Key messages – use of reserves is good, the schools proposals should be reconsidered, the community empowerment fund should remain and the council should look to generate income to mitigate against further cuts where possible.

Ystrad Mynach

Had detailed conversations with eight residents – including one councillor from the Llanbradach ward. 4F and 4M – 7 were 50+, one F was 36-50.

One couple highlighted the importance of day centres and transport to those day centres as important community assets for vulnerable adults and children (not directly related to the budget.) Felt also that libraries should be used more efficiently as community hubs and that green spaces should be protected at all costs.

An in-depth conversation with another resident highlighted a consistent theme that things shouldn't be looked at in black and white – some thought should go into these proposals. For example, the 901 bus link service is under-utilised, yet doesn't accept paying customers without a railcard. Similarly feels the Markham leisure centre proposal is short-sighted. Will £10k savings really equate to those savings when thinking about the possible repercussions from an increase in anti-social

behaviour as a result? Also, why can't schools who need the support for energy costs ask for it? Others may not need the financial subsidy. They could be asked to justify the 50% contribution from CCBC.

It was felt that while the proposal to reduce the subsidy at the tourism venues is a positive, the Winding House needs protecting as the only museum in the county borough.

The heating system investment at Penallta House was communicated poorly in one residents' opinion – they were unaware it is an invest to save model that will generate savings in the longer term.

There was a consensus that the community empowerment fund, the sustainable development budget and the voluntary sector SLA budgets should remain, and that removing these would be short-sighted.

One resident felt that protecting the highways maintenance budget was critical, as was the provision of late night transport. Grass cutting frequency was also discussed, with agreement to the proposal and a request that the council keeps pushing for the Metro to progress as soon as possible.

Another resident felt the foster care, youth service, music service and community centres proposals were short sighted and should be reconsidered, and felt that the council tax increase was completely unfair. It was felt that the £4.8 million this would generate should instead come from reserves. Also questioned why CCBC has more in reserve than Cardiff Council.

Again, there was universal support for maintaining the community empowerment fund, the sustainable development budget and the voluntary sector SLAs. When we are asking communities to do more, we need to enable them, not hinder.

Key messages – a number of the proposals are short sighted, and with a bit of thought, they could be reconfigured rather than looking at things in black and white. Salami slicing obviously hasn't worked and a strategic overview of savings is needed. The funds for communities and the voluntary sector should be maintained.

Bargoed

2 residents attended (one a councillor for the Pengam/Cefn Fforest ward).

Impact assessments are not adequate – The budget impact assessments note the level of impact but need more information on what is going to be done to mitigate that – cuts have knock on effect to other services and partners

Disagree with removing CEF – cutting this does have an impact on community groups to support people when we are looking for the voluntary sector to support. Resident attends walking football that was funded by the CEF. Small community groups are flourishing because the support is coming from the community – removal will remove ability of vol sector to deliver services – don't cut grants at a time when people haven't been able to access recently for covid and other reasons

Many proposals are impacting on the most vulnerable in the community. This is short sighted and impacts unfairly and disproportionately on these groups.

Concerns around

- SENCOM – communication is not clear so information can be misinterpreted. 32 deaf blind people living in the borough
- Shared lives – impacting on budget realignment
- Children with disabilities – there is a demand but residents are struggling to access the services (many services were removed during covid e.g day care centres)
- We don't know the impact of pandemic on mental health – and need a safety net for the vulnerable in the community –
- There is no access to many services including mental health support – or where there is provision, the service isn't adequately meeting the needs of families – these need specialist care that is not available to meet demand
- In discussing all of these concerns, it was felt there is a real lack of social value/ethos to these savings proposals, which is painful to see

There was discussion around the council needing to further explore external grants for match funding, similar to the successful levelling up fund bid for the new Caerphilly leisure centre, particularly around housing and infrastructure. The inequality across the borough was also highlighted, particularly in terms of the Caerphilly 2035 programme – what about the rest of the borough?

Communication around inescapable pressures is poor – better communication would help people understand the wider picture – not just the cuts.

It was also felt that community liaison officers are incredibly important assets to have in supported residents to better understand and listen to concerns about particular areas .

Key messages – completely opposed to the proposals that impact upon vulnerable people, including those with disabilities. The community funds should remain as removing these is short sighted. There is a lack of social value demonstrated throughout the budget proposals, which is disappointing to see.

Newbridge

2 people attended the session (50+ M/F)

Need to prioritise services for local people. Priorities should be education, carers, libraries (to support education).

People need places to live and the council is doing what it can on that - but there is a need to create infrastructure to support new housing developments. There is nowhere to park in Newbridge town centre, makes it difficult to come and support the local businesses – no parking – resident permit are understandable.

Certain things people should pay for themselves e.g. musical instrument, arts is a luxury, reading and writing is crucial

Big issue is lack of public transport – especially to the hospital - – subsidise bus to the Grange

Public transport in general - live in Treowen, last bus 5pm – before the shops shut

Resident has a council property and takes pride in it. Repair service from the council has been very problematic – quality of workmanship for repair was terrible and had to be redone – process is

inefficient, lack of communication, came, said needed new toilet, went to store, came back toilet was concreted to the floor new toilet won't fit, soil pipe in different position etc... in effect, the resident felt that the whole process was inefficient and there was a lack of communication from the outset resulting in a waste of time and money. In the end, the supervisor had to come out, 2 new plumbers came and fixed it – total 2 weeks plus.

Carers are expected to do too much in a short time – need to allow the right amount of time, right people for the right jobs

Another example re gritting – called for gritting, 3 arrived, 1 gritted, not enough, had to come again and do properly

It's a false economy to cut staff too much, people who are good will leave, promote the people who do the jobs well - don't cut so much there aren't enough to do the job properly.

Key messages were around streamlining processes to reduce inefficiency and wasting resources, cutting staff levels too much results in not being able to deliver services effectively. There are issues in Newbridge around car parking, public transport and access to local services as a result (in particular for those needing to get to the Grange)