

Caerphilly County Borough Council Budget Consultation 2019/20 Summary Report

Introduction

In October 2018, Welsh Government announced its provisional budget settlement, which outlined how much money will go into public services across Wales for the next financial year (2019/20). Under the settlement, Caerphilly County Borough Council faced a funding reduction of 0.3%.

This coupled with inescapable pressures that the Council has to fund, means that the Council needed to find savings of over £15.6 million for the next year alone.

A series of draft budget proposals totalling almost £14.7 million were considered by Cabinet on 14th November 2018 alongside a proposed Council Tax rise of 6.95% to cover the remaining shortfall.

The views of residents and stakeholders views were sought on the draft proposals over a period of 6 weeks from **19th November 2018 to 11th January 2019**, with views expressed as part of this consultation to be fed back to and considered by elected Members prior to the final budget for 2018/19 being agreed at a special meeting of full Council in **February 2019**.

Annexes relating to this report can be found at
<https://www.caerphilly.gov.uk/thecaerphillyconversation>

Methodology

An extensive period of engagement with residents and stakeholders began prior to and during a formal consultation on the draft savings proposals. The formal consultation period ran **between 19th November 2018 and 11th January 2019**. Key elements of the engagement were:

- Media and digital media campaign
- Awareness raising and engagement in the 5 main town centres
- Face to face drop in sessions held at venues across the county borough
- A survey distributed via the Council's newsletter "Newsliner", made available on the Council's website and at all main Council buildings and libraries.
- Written communication with stakeholder groups (including Councillors, Town and Community Councils)
- Face to face "Viewpoint Panel" meeting held on 28th November 2018
- Additional face-to-face meetings with Trade Unions and other stakeholder groups
 - Voluntary Sector Liaison Committee meeting
 - Special Scrutiny Committee Meetings

The main elements of the engagement and consultation process are outlined below. Further details of each element of the public and stakeholder engagement can be found in the appendices.

Media and Digital Media Campaign

In the months prior to the launch of the consultation and throughout the consultation period, a range of web, media and social media activity was carried out to raise awareness of the financial situation facing the Council and to promote and encourage residents to take part and have their say in the consultation process.

A key element of the activity prior to and during the consultation period focussed on increasing understanding of the unprecedented financial situation and the reasons why the Council is faced with having to make such difficult financial decisions.

It highlighted areas such as the inescapable financial pressures that the Council must fund, the significant (but relatively small in the grand scheme) role that Council Tax has in funding council services and the rationale for the Council needing to ask residents to pay a little more, through Council Tax, for the services they receive.

Activities carried out as part of this work included:

- Video
- Web content
- Infographic/information leaflet
- Media releases
- Digital media including Facebook, Twitter and NewsOnline (see **Annex 7**)

These and a range of other communication channels were also used throughout the consultation period to remind and encourage residents to give their views.

Town Centre Engagement and Public Drop in sessions

During the first week of the consultation period (20th – 23rd November 2018), Cabinet members and supporting officers visited each of the 5 main town centres across the county borough - Bargoed, Blackwood, Caerphilly, Risca and Ystrad Mynach.

Located in areas of high footfall, the purpose of these visits was to raise awareness of the financial pressures facing the Council and to encourage residents to take part and inform them of how they could have their say on the proposed budget savings through providing details of the online survey and forthcoming face to face drop in sessions.

Face to face drop in sessions were held at 9 venues across the county borough between 26th November and 13th December 2018 as shown in **Table 1**.

Each of these drop-in sessions was attended by a member of the senior management team, staff from the Communications and Corporate Finance team and at least one Cabinet member. The sessions were publicised widely at the venues and at the main Council premises across the county borough. Local Councillors were asked to encourage attendance and regular reminders were sent out via social

media. Residents were encouraged to come in and chat to officers and Cabinet members and to find out more about the proposals and provide feedback through completing a questionnaire. This approach allowed face to face interaction with individuals and encouraged debate and discussion.

In total **121 people** attended the drop in sessions across the nine venues with New Tredegar and Nelson seeing the greatest footfall. All who attended viewed the information and engaged in discussion with most taking away a copy of the survey to complete. The demographic composition of attendees was skewed towards the older age groups however, there was a good cross section of male and female attendees.

Table 1: Face to Face Session

Date and time	Venue	Attendees
26/11/18 (10am - 1pm)	Rhymney Library	7
27/11/18 (2pm – 5.45pm)	Bargoed Library	16
29/11/18 (2pm – 6pm)	Caerphilly Library	7
30/11/18 (10.30am – 1.30pm)	New Tredegar, Whiterose Centre	23
3/12/18 (10.30am – 2.30pm)	Risca Palace	14
6/12/18 (10am – 12.30pm)	Ystrad Mynach Library	11
11/12/18 (10.30am – 1.30pm)	Newbridge “Tabernacle”	8
12/12/18 (3pm – 6pm)	Nelson Library	20
13/12/18 (10.30am – 2.30pm)	Blackwood Library	15

Survey

A short open ended questionnaire was developed to seek views on the draft budget proposal. A copy of the questionnaire can be found in **Annex 1**.

The questionnaire asked respondents to give their views on the savings proposals outlined indicating whether they strongly agree or disagree with any of the cuts listed and to give reasons for their views. Respondents were also asked to provide any ideas they may have about how we can limit the impact of any of these proposals on our communities.

The questionnaire then asked respondents to identify whether they feel that budget cuts in a specific area will affect them as an individual (positively or negatively) because of their ethnic origin, gender, age, marital status, sexual orientation,

disability, gender reassignment, religious beliefs or non-belief, use of Welsh language, BSL or other languages, nationality or responsibility for any dependents.

Looking forward to 2020 and beyond, the questionnaire then prompted respondents to suggest areas of spending that be reduced, removed or that service users could be charged for.

The survey and supporting consultation information (draft proposals and completed Equality Impact Assessments for each proposal) was included on the CCBC website for the duration of the consultation period (19th November 2018 to 11th January 2019) with a prominent front page banner and a link directly to the survey.

Details of draft budget proposals were highlighted on the front page of the December 2018 edition of the Council's newsletter "Newslines" with further information and the questionnaire included in a central pull out section of the publication. "Newslines" is delivered to every household within the county borough.

The survey was also shared with a wide range of key stakeholders and groups (as outlined in **Annex 2**) via e-mail and/or in printed format as appropriate.

"Viewpoint Panel" Meeting

On Wednesday 28th November 2018, 37 residents from across the county borough attended a meeting at 6pm in Penallta House. Groups represented included the Caerphilly County Borough Viewpoint Panel, Caerphilly Parent Network, Caerphilly 50+ Forum and the Welsh speaking community through Menter Iaith Caerffili. Of these, 23 were male and 14 were female.

In addition, 15 members of Caerphilly Youth Forum, aged 12 to 24, attended the meeting. Of these 3 were boys and 12 were girls.

Prior to the meeting, attendees were provided with details of the proposals and on arrival, were welcomed by Councillor David Poole, Leader of Caerphilly County Borough Council. After listening to a presentation by the Head of Corporate Finance in the Council Chamber, attendees were then split into smaller groups where they were invited to discuss the draft proposals in more detail.

The discussion sessions focussed on identifying how attendees felt the impact of the proposals could be limited for them as individuals and on their communities. The discussion then moved to identifying suggestions for areas of spending that could be reduced, removed, or that service users could be charged for looking forward to 2020. The discussion topics closely reflected the questionnaire included in the survey but allowed for a more in depth discussion and debate of the options identified.

One group was conducted through the medium of Welsh (this included 3 adults and 3 young people) and another group was led by the Youth Service to ensure that

young people had an opportunity to have their say. Throughout the discussion, senior officers and Cabinet members were available to clarify the draft proposals and provide context where needed.

Additional Stakeholder Consultation

In addition to the written correspondence with stakeholders noted above, additional face to face discussions were held at the Voluntary Sector Liaison Committee on 5th December (See **Annex 5**). Meetings were held with the trade unions and the following Special Scrutiny Committee Meetings were held:

- Special, **Policy and Resources** Scrutiny Committee - Monday, 3rd December, 2018
- Special, **Health Social Care and Wellbeing** Scrutiny Committee - Thursday, 6th December, 2018
- Special, **Education for Life** Scrutiny Committee - Monday, 17th December, 2018
- Special, **Regeneration and Environment** Scrutiny Committee - Tuesday, 18th December, 2018

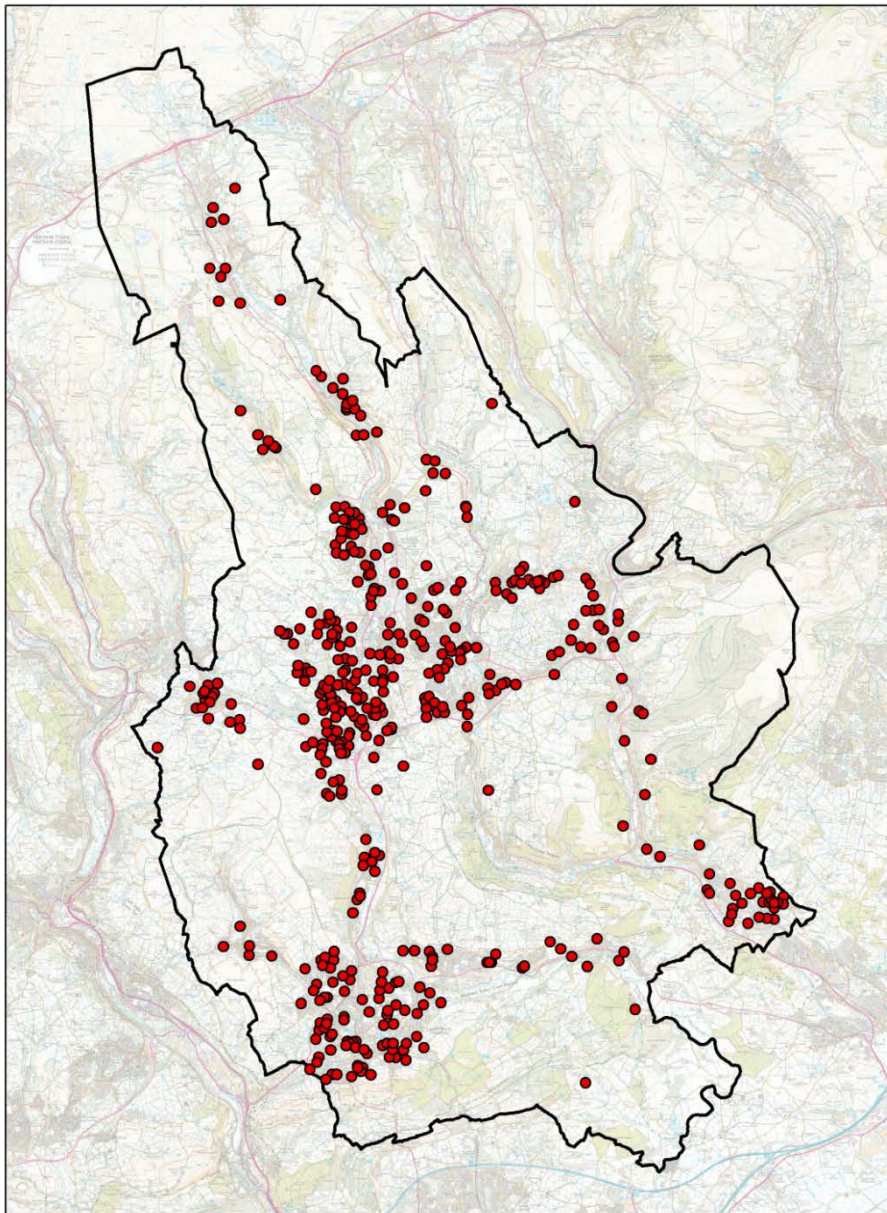
The details of these discussions are recorded outside of this report and are available on the Council's website www.caerphilly.gov.uk .

Responses

The total number of responses received to the survey was **708** (2 were completed in Welsh). 94% of respondents were residents of the county borough and as shown in **Map 1**, there was a good geographical distribution from across the area. 43% of respondents were male whilst 22% indicated that they have a disability. A full respondent profile can be found in **Annex 3**. A digest of comments received via the survey can be found in **Annex 4**.

Map 1: Postcode distribution of survey respondents (n=559)

MTFP 2019-20 Survey Responses by Postcode



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A further 19 responses were received from residents via e-mail, letter and the Council's website. In addition, written responses were received from the following elected representatives/groups/organisations:

- Agape Church
- Barnardo's, Bargoed (re Phillipstown Community Centre)
- Bedwas, Trethomas and Machen Ward Labour Party
- Cllr K Etheridge
- Cllr R Gough
- Future Generations Commissioner
- Gelligaer Community Centre
- Gelligaer Community Council
- Gerald Jones MP
- Hefin David AM
- Llanbradach and Pwll-y-pant Community Council
- Nelson Community Council
- Pen-y-bryn Community Centre
- Rhymney Community Council
- Tir y Berth Village Hall Management Committee
- Voluntary Sector Liaison Committee (meeting on 5th December 2018)
- Stakeholder responses relating to subsidised bus services (extended period)

The full digest of the responses received is included in **Annex 5**.

A transcript of the Viewpoint Panel meeting discussion can be found in **Annex 6**.

A selection of social media response is included in **Annex 7**.

Responses received after the closing date have not been included in the analysis.

Petitions

A number of petitions have been received and will be presented and considered alongside the consultation findings:

1. Pen y Bryn Community Centre – Petition against CCBC proposed cut backs regarding payment of Caretaker wages.
2. Gelligaer Community Council – Petition in relation to the proposed cessation of the Community Safety Warden Service through the Borough in the CCBC Budget Consultation
3. Gelligaer Community Council – Petition in relation to the proposed closure of Penallta Civic Amenity Site CCBC Budget Consultation 2019/20
4. Cllr Lyndon Binding – Petition against the removal of funding for the Children's Splash Park
5. Cllr Eluned Stenner - Petition against the closure of Phillipstown Community Centre

Key Findings and Themes

A large number of comments received made reference to the ongoing investigation relating to senior officer pay. These comments have been noted and are included in the appendices to this report but do not fall within the remit of the consultation. A number of other issues were raised that fall outside control of the Council, namely:

- The number of Councillors and Councillor pay/expenses
- Prescription charges, free bus passes and Welsh language provision
- Town centre flowers and stand-alone firework displays

Key themes emerging from the survey were reflected in responses from other sources and as such, the key themes highlighted below reflect all consultation responses and not just those from the survey.

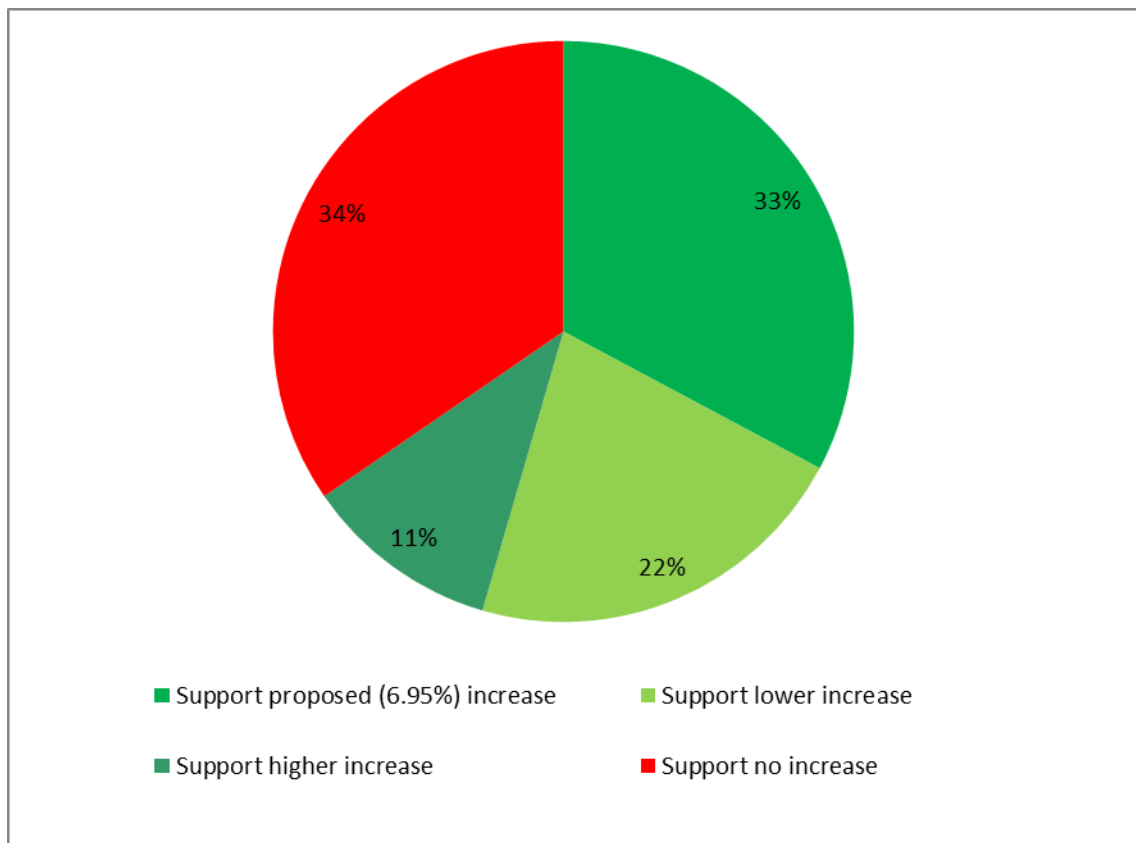
Council Tax Increase

In relation to the proposed increase in Council Tax, survey respondents were asked to choose from 4 options:

1. I support the proposed increase in Council tax (6.95%) which would mean an increase of £1.41 per week for a Band D property
2. I support a lower increase in Council Tax. (Every 1% reduction from the proposed 6.95% would mean having to find a further £496k of savings)
3. I support a greater increase in Council Tax. (Every 1% increase above the proposed 6.95% would mean having to find £496k less savings)
4. I do not support an increase in Council Tax and understand that this would mean having to find further savings to balance the budget.

As highlighted in **Graph 1**, 34% of those who responded to the question were in favour of no increase in Council Tax. A similar proportion (33%) supported the proposed rise in Council Tax of 6.95%, whilst 11% indicated that they would be prepared to support an even greater increase.

Graph 1: Preference for Council Tax Increase (n= 668)



An analysis of the text responses highlighted some reasons behind preferences for the proposed Council Tax increases given. For those who did not support any increase in Council Tax, a key factor was the unfairness of a “pay more, get less” scenario where, despite an increase in Council Tax, fewer services can be provided. A number also made reference to the need to save money in other ways (increased efficiency and less waste, a reduction in senior management salaries).

Of those in support of an increase in Council Tax, some indicated that they did so reluctantly whilst others indicated that they understood the necessity for such increases. A key reason for supporting an increase was to help ensure that key services to support the most vulnerable in the community could be maintained.

Views on the savings proposals

Whilst some respondents felt that the proposals were balanced, there was strong disagreement with a number of key areas within the savings proposals:

- Provision of Meals Direct Service to Section 117 clients only (High Impact).

With little exception, there were strong feelings that this service should be retained and that the removal of this service would impact on a vulnerable sector of the community. It was felt by many that no appropriate alternative is available and that the service provides more than simply a hot meal to clients.

- Waste Management – Closure of 2 Civic Amenity sites at Penallta and Aberbargoed (Medium Impact).

Particular concerns were raised about the impact on the cleanliness of local area and specifically to the impact on illegal fly tipping. The choice of the proposed sites, particularly the site at Penallta was questioned as these sites considered to be well located and well used by those residents who responded to the survey.

- Community Centres – reduction in all Caretaker support across all Centres from October 2019 (High Impact)

Whilst a number of respondents disagreed with the closure of specific Community Centres, there was more concern with the wide impact of removing funding for caretaker support across all centres. Community Centres are seen to be key in providing services to local communities and it was felt that their use should be encouraged.

Other areas of concern that were raised by a number of respondents were:

- Cessation of the Community Safety Warden Service – Removal of the Service (High)

There were some mixed views on the provision of community safety wardens. Whilst some strongly supported retaining these roles and were concerned about the impact on the safety of local community, a number felt that community safety should be the responsibility of the Police Service or indicated that they had never seen a Community Safety Warden in their area.

- Highways Maintenance – various budgets

Comments related to the possible increase in damage to vehicles and increased costs that could result from a poorly maintained road network in the longer term.

- Waste Management

Many felt that reduced levels of cleansing have already led to a decline in town centres and local communities and that this should not be reduced further.

Introduction of rat treatment fees was not welcomed as it was felt this would discourage use of the service, exacerbate the problem and not bring in a large income.

- Closure of all 5 Public Conveniences – Closure in all towns (High)

Comments related to the need to maintain provision in town centres and at transport hubs as it was felt those who need them most would be discouraged from visiting local town centres. Alternative means of provision (e.g. using private businesses) was mentioned by a few respondents as was the need to consider this proposal in light of the Local Toilet Strategy.

- Social Services

A number of comments made reference to the need to protect the most vulnerable in society and felt that cuts to services within Social Services would have a big impact on certain sectors in our communities.

- In relation to cuts to the Voluntary Sector

Care should be taken to ensure that introducing alternative ways of providing services does not impact on the quality and level of service received. A number of comments suggested that there is a need to increase the use of voluntary sector providers to plug the gaps in services that can no longer be provided by the Council.

- Events

There were mixed views relating to events. Whilst some felt they encourage tourism, others felt them to be a poor use of resources.

- Transport

It was felt by some that removing bus routes and increasing charges for use of public transport could be counter productive at a time when residents are being encouraged to move away from using cars.

- Schools and Education

A reduction in funding for schools and education was considered, by a number of people, to be detrimental on young people and it was felt that these proposed cuts would have longer term implications for the community.

- Libraries

Libraries are considered by some to be a key service and full use should be made of library buildings, whilst others felt that some library services could be charged for and smaller branches could be shut.

Reduce Impact

Groups considered to be impacted more by the proposals were older people, younger people and those with disabilities. The cumulative impact of savings on these vulnerable sectors of the community was noted by a number of respondents.

It was also noted by some respondents that those in work but on low incomes may be disproportionately disadvantaged and that the cumulative impact would be felt by some geographical communities more than others.

Suggestions for reducing the impact of savings included suggestions to simply not remove some services at all, with particular reference to those services highlighted in the previous section, and finding ways of saving money elsewhere through improved efficiency and less waste.

A number of comments made reference to short term savings having wider and longer term impact on other services, which could in turn result in additional financial burden on the Council and impact on other services such as the health service and Police. For example, it was felt that the removal of the Meals Direct service could have implications for carers, other social services provision and the health service. Closure of Civic Amenity sites could have implications for fly tipping and increased pressure on cleansing services.

Looking forward to 2020 and beyond

Looking forward to 2020 and beyond, suggestions were sought for areas of spending that could be reduced, removed completely or that could be charged for.

Reduce spending on/Remove spending completely

There was a wide range of responses in relation to how the Council could reduce spending or suggestions for areas that spending could be completely removed with some suggesting that all non-essential services should be cut whilst others indicating that no services should be cut.

There were many comments relating to reducing waste and inefficiency – e.g. reducing corporate spending on catering, vehicles. A number suggested a review of management structures and looking at the costs associated with staffing.

Buildings – a number suggested that Council buildings should be rationalised to save money and that those buildings that remain are utilised fully and could be used as a source of income through hire and rental.

Charge for

Many of the comments under this section related to the generation of income through increased enforcement and penalty charges for litter, dog fouling, fly tipping and illegal car parking.

Where not already noted above, other areas that respondents felt could be charged for include:

- Staff meals
- Public Toilets
- Meals Direct
- Bulky Waste/Garden Waste (mixed views)

A greater increase in Council Tax was felt appropriate by some - rather than the introduction of numerous small charges elsewhere.