

Caerphilly County Borough Council Budget Consultation 2020/21 Summary Report

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Introduction

A series of draft budget proposals totalling almost £8.5 million were considered by Cabinet on 13th November 2019 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 **18th November 2019 to 13th January 2020**, with views expressed as part of this consultation to be fed back and considered by Cabinet on 12th February 2020 prior to the final budget for 2020/21 being agreed at a special meeting of full Council on **20th February 2020**.

Methodology

A formal consultation on the draft savings proposals for 2020/21 took place between **18th November 2019 and 13th January 2020**. This was preceded by a period of engagement - information sharing and awareness raising.

Key elements of the engagement and consultation include:

- A media and digital media campaign
- A survey distributed via the Council's newsletter "Newslite", 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 conversations
 - drop in sessions held at 9 libraries across the county borough
 - a "Viewpoint Panel" meeting held on 25th November 2019
- Additional face-to-face meetings with
 - Voluntary Sector Liaison Committee
 - Special Scrutiny Committees
 - Trade Unions and other key stakeholder groups

The main elements of the engagement and consultation process are summarised below. Further details of each element of the public and stakeholder consultation can be found in the annexes to this report.

Media and Digital Media Campaign

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 on the draft savings proposals.

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

It highlighted the 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 more, through Council Tax, for the services they receive.

Following a positive provisional settlement from Welsh Government in December, the media and digital media campaign reminded residents how important it was for them to have their say on the services that are most important to them.

Activities carried out as part of this work included:

- Video
- Web content
- Infographic/information leaflet
- Media releases
- Digital media including Facebook, Twitter and NewsOnline

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 survey and supporting consultation information (draft proposals, completed Equality Impact Assessments and budget templates for each proposal) was included on the CCBC website for the duration of the consultation period 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 2019 edition of the Council's newsletter "Newsline" with further information and the questionnaire included in a central pull out section of the publication. "Newsline" is delivered to every household within the county borough.

Written Communication with those directly impacted and key stakeholder groups

Details of the proposals and a link to the survey was shared widely with a range of key stakeholders and groups (as outlined in [Annex 2](#)) via e-mail and/or in printed format as appropriate.

Those for whom certain proposals were considered to have a direct impact were engaged directly including:

- Meals Direct clients
- Parents in relation to school crossing patrol and school meal price increases
- Voluntary sector organisations (Citizens Advice Bureau, GAVO and Groundwork)

Face to Face Engagement

Due to the election taking place on 12th December 2019, elected members were unable to participate in the face to face public engagement around the budget proposals for 2020/21 as they have done in previous years.

Public Drop in sessions

Face to face drop in sessions were held at 9 libraries across the county borough between 27th November and 9th December 2019 as shown in **Table 1**.

Drop-in sessions were facilitated by officers from the Service Improvement and Partnerships/Communications and Corporate Finance teams alongside senior officers. The sessions were publicised widely at the venues and at the main Council premises across the county borough. Local Councillors were asked to promote the sessions and regular reminders were sent out via social media. Residents were encouraged to come in and speak with officers to find out more about the draft proposals and to provide feedback through completing a questionnaire. This approach allowed face to face interaction with individuals and encouraged debate and discussion.

Across the 9 drop in sessions, **68** residents engaged in discussion with officers with Blackwood Library seeing the greatest footfall. A number also took the time to vote on the proposed Council Tax increase and took away a copy of the survey to complete. The demographic composition of attendees was skewed towards older age groups, with a larger number of female attendees than male.

Table 1: Face to Face Session

Date and time	Venue	Engaged with
27.11.19 (10.00am - 12.30pm)	Rhymney Library	5
27.11.19 (3.30pm - 6.00pm)	Caerphilly Library	6
28.11.19 (10.00am - 12.30pm)	Newbridge Library	9
29.11.19 (10.30am - 1.00pm)	White Rose Resource Centre, New Tredegar (and Parent Network PLANET event at Fochriw Community Centre)	9 (6)
02.12.19 (10.00am - 1.00pm)	Bargoed Library	7
04.12.19 (2.00pm - 4.00pm)	Nelson Library	8
05.12.19 (10.30am - 12.30pm)	Blackwood Library	15
06.12.19 (10.30am - 12.30pm)	Ystrad Mynach Library	5
09.12.19 (3.00pm - 6.00pm)	Risca Palace Library	4

“Viewpoint Panel” Meeting

On Monday 25th November 2019, **27** residents from across the county borough attended a meeting at Penallta House. Groups represented included the Caerphilly County Borough Viewpoint Panel, Caerphilly Youth Forum, Caerphilly Parent Network and Caerphilly 50+ Forum.

Prior to the meeting, attendees were provided with details of the proposals and on arrival, were welcomed by Richard Edmunds, Corporate Director of Education and Corporate Services of Caerphilly County Borough Council. After listening to a presentation by the Head of Corporate Finance in the Council Chamber, attendees were asked to vote on their preference for Council Tax increase then split into smaller groups where they were invited to discuss the draft proposals in more detail.

The aim of the meeting was to facilitate discussion in relation to the following:

- the proposed savings that participants most agreed and disagreed with
- suggestions for alternative ways to achieve the required savings
- how the Council can work together with our communities to deliver services differently

Throughout the discussion, senior officers were available to clarify details relating to the draft proposals and provide context where needed.

Additional Face to Face Stakeholder Engagement

Additional face to face discussions were held with

Voluntary Sector Liaison Committee

Prior to the full meeting of the VSLC, the Voluntary Sector Representatives met on 20th November to discuss the budget proposals in detail.

The Voluntary Sector Liaison Committee met on 5th December 2019 to consider the draft budget proposals for 2020/21. (Draft meeting notes were available at the time of reporting and these can be found in [Annex 3](#)).

Trade Unions

The Trade Unions were consulted on the draft budget proposals through our internal Joint Consultative Committee process.

Special Scrutiny Committees

Each scrutiny committee consists of 16 councillors and has a statutory 'watchdog' role to ensure that the Council carries out its responsibilities properly and where necessary, are accountable for their actions. The following Special Scrutiny Committee meetings were held to consider the draft budget proposals and medium term financial plan for 2020/21:

Social Services - 3rd December 2019

Housing & Regeneration, - 5th December 2019

Education - 9th December 2019

Environment & Sustainability - 10th December 2019

Policy & Resources - 11th December 2019

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

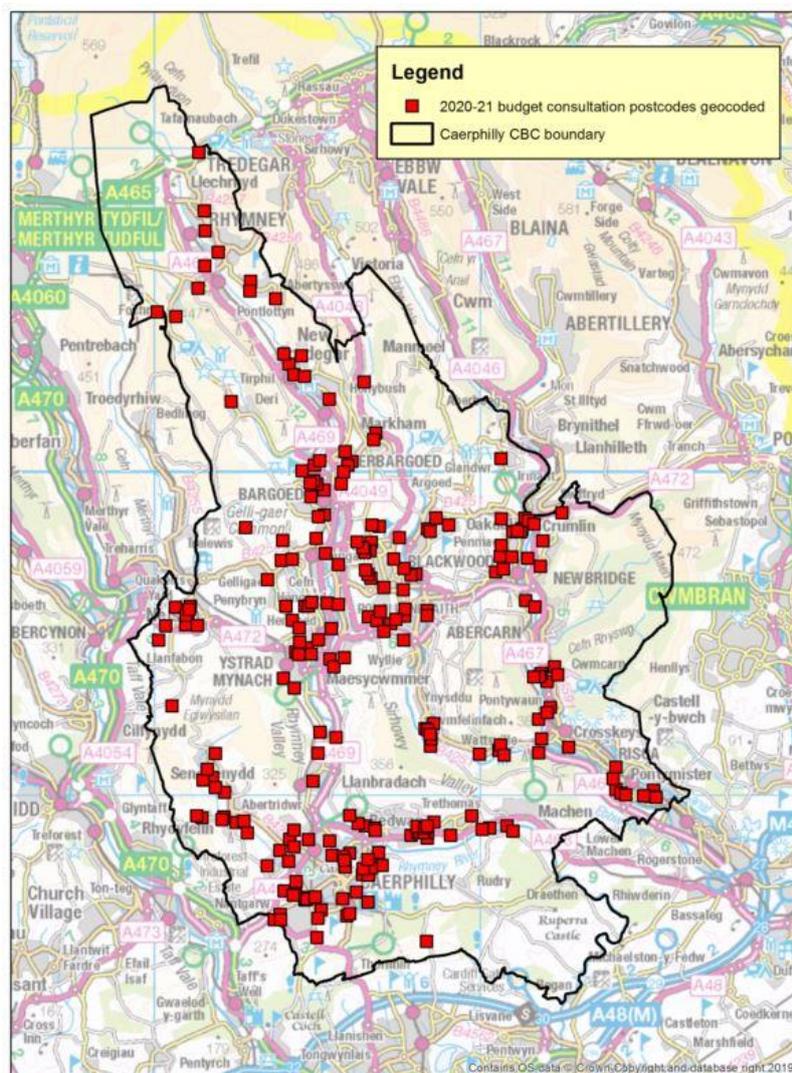
Responses

Survey

The total number of responses received to the survey was 371 (5 were completed in Welsh).

Ninety five percent of respondents were residents of the county borough and as shown in **Map 1**, there was a good geographical distribution from across the area. Fifty two percent of respondents were female, 42% were male and 15% indicated that they have a disability. A full respondent profile can be found in [Annex 4](#). A digest of comments received via the survey can be found in [Annex 5](#).

Map 1: Postcode distribution of survey respondents



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Further responses were received from residents via e-mail, letter and social media. In addition, written responses were received from the following elected representatives/groups/organisations:

Annex 6 - Digest of additional responses received.

- a) Letter from Caerphilly Blaenau Gwent Citizens Advice Bureau
- b) Response from GAVO
- c) Response from Gelligaer Community Council
- d) Response from Llanbradach and Pwll y Pant Community Council
- e) Response from Aber Valley Partnership
- f) Response from Blackwood Town Council
- g) Response from Bedwas, Trethomas and Machen Community Council
- h) Response from Cllr James Pritchard
- i) Response from Croeso Club
- j) Response from Groundwork
- k) Response from Hefin David AM
- l) Response from Nelson Community Council
- m) Response from Voluntary Sector Liaison Committee
- n) Response from Wayne David, MP
- o) Additional written responses and e-mails received

Annex 7 - Summary of Viewpoint Panel meeting discussion

Annex 8 - Feedback from face to face drop in sessions

Annex 9 - A digest of social media response

Petitions

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

1. Save our Children, Save our Crossing Patrol – Waunfawr Primary School, Crosskeys. 271 signatories plus 1 letter
2. Save our Crossing Lady – Cwmcarn Primary School – 197 signatories
3. We the undersigned call on Caerphilly County Borough Council, not to go ahead with the proposed decommissioning of CCTV Cameras in the villages of Senghenydd and Abertridwr, as part of its budget proposals for 2020-21.

Key Findings and Themes

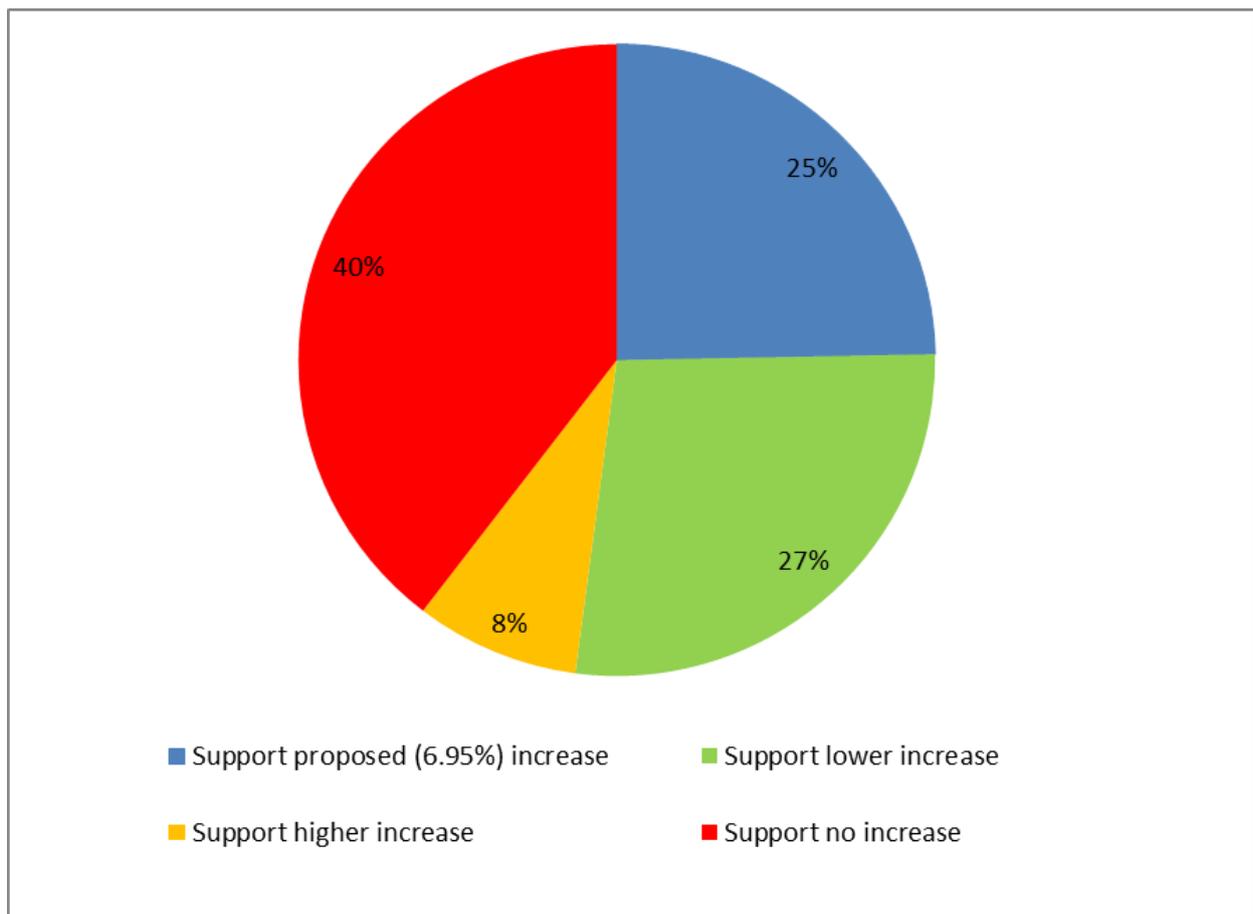
Council Tax Increase (239 responses)

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%)
2. I do not support the proposed council tax increase – it's too much. However, I'd support a lower increase in council tax
3. I support the proposed increase in council tax and would be prepared to pay an even greater increase if required
4. I do not support any increase in council tax

Graph 1 shows that 25% of respondents would support the proposed increase with a further 8% being prepared to pay an even greater increase and 27% supporting a lower increase. However, 40% do not support any increase in Council Tax.

Graph 1: Preference for Council Tax Increase (n= 336)



An analysis of the text responses highlighted the reasons behind preferences for the proposed Council Tax increases.

If not through an increase in Council Tax, how else do you feel we can achieve the required savings

A number of respondents felt that it is unfair to expect residents to pay more when their services are being reduced and the proposed increase is too great in line with other cost of living rises.

The more favourable settlement from Welsh Government in early December was noted by respondents who felt that an increase in council tax would therefore not be required.

Many of the responses to this question were of a similar nature to those given in relation to “Ideas for delivering services differently to meet the current and future needs of residents” below.

Views on the savings proposals

Areas of specific concern and those where there was a level of agreement with the proposals are outlined below:

Areas of widest concern

- Closure of Trehir Household Waste Recycling Centre
- 2% schools budget reduction
- School crossing patrol
- Highway maintenance budget
- Voluntary sector cuts
- Street lighting maintenance budget (some comments referred to light switch off rather than specifically this proposal)
- Charging for bulky waste
- Cleansing staff reduction
- Youth service
- CCTV
- School meal price increase
- Meals Direct
- Community centres
- Pest control charging

Mixed Views

There were mixed views in relation to merging Community Safety Wardens with the Environmental Health General Enforcement Team.

Library Services – there were mixed views In relation to library services. Some felt cuts were appropriate whilst others felt that libraries are a valuable resource and should be used more.

Areas of agreement

There was a general agreement that the Council should work towards being more efficient, delete vacant posts and wherever possible limit the impact of savings proposals on residents themselves.

Increasing charges: with the exception of charging for meals direct, school meals, pest control and bulky waste (noted above), there was general agreement that charges could be increased for specific services e.g. planning – income from charging for advice and staff meals.

General themes

General themes that emerged from the consultation

- Some proposals were considered counterproductive e.g.
 - closure of Trehir and increase in bulky waste charges leading to more fly tipping
 - removing funding to voluntary sector considered to support the work of the Council
- Concerns over safety (school crossing patrols/street lighting and to a lesser extent CCTV/Community Safety Wardens)
- Concerns over the environmental impact of some proposals e.g.
 - rat treatment fees
 - Trehir Civic Amenity Site closure
 - Bulky waste charges
- Concerns over impact on the most vulnerable (particularly older people, young people and disabled people) and economically disadvantaged
- There were a number of comments about
 - the council wasting money
 - having too many senior officers and Councillors and
 - paying senior staff and Councillors too much

Equalities implications

Respondents highlighted a number of areas where they felt proposals would have a detrimental impact on those who are more vulnerable in our communities on the basis of their protected characteristics, for example:

- School crossing patrols (age, carers)
- School meals and Meals Direct (age)
- CCTV and reduction in street lighting (age, gender and disability)
- Highway and footpath maintenance (disability)
- Libraries (age, disability)

A number also referenced the socio-economic impact of some of the proposals e.g. increase in charges and a reduction in transport would have a more detrimental impact on those on low incomes.

Ideas for delivering services differently to meet the current and future needs of residents

A number of themes and suggestions emerged:

- Review internal working practices and structures
 - Reduce senior management
 - Multi-skill staff
 - Reduce bureaucracy and avoid duplication
- Share resources – collaboration, joined up working, joint procurement
- Focus on priorities – be clear about what they are
- Income generation to fund investment in key services
- Be creative
- Reduce the number of local elected members
- Consider environmental impact and carbon reduction in delivery of services
- Digital but not to the detriment of face to face contact for those who need it – services accessible to all – improved transport
- Longer term planning rather than reactive spending – prevention
- Use data to make informed decisions and in forward planning
- Transparency
- Work with communities – consult more effectively and meaningfully – clearly explained
- Work with businesses
- Prioritise education and youth services – these are key foundations for thriving future communities
- Utilise volunteers

How the wider community can work to support the council to deliver services differently

Key recurring themes in the comments received:

- Improve engagement with communities
 - People feel disengaged. There is a need to reach out and regain the trust of communities – without this, communities will not take ownership and support the Council to help deliver services
 - Be accountable
 - Show that the Council values residents views and has listened
 - Engaging young people through education, schools

- Understanding is key - ensure residents have a clear understanding of the role of the Council and the services it provides
- Support and utilise volunteers and the voluntary sector
 - Many already volunteer
 - Continue to support voluntary organisations
 - Provide incentives for volunteering and recognise and value skills
 - Encouraging and support local community groups (e.g. through advice and legal support) to take more responsibility
- Share resources – between service areas, with partners, local volunteering organisations, local businesses and wider with neighbouring authorities
 - Use existing buildings (e.g. libraries) as Hubs for service delivery by co-locating (to include voluntary organisations)
- Transfer assets to communities e.g. community centres, playing fields – communities to take responsibility
- Asset rationalisation – reduce the number of office buildings etc
- Embrace technology in delivering services more efficiently
- Charge for services – if people want to use them, they will pay

List of Annexes:

- 1 [Consultation Survey](#)
- 2 [Stakeholder list](#)
- 3 [Voluntary Sector Liaison Committee Draft meeting notes](#)
- 4 [Survey respondent profile](#)
- 5 [Survey digest of comments \(redacted\)](#)
- 6 [Additional written responses received](#)
- 7 [Viewpoint Panel Meeting Feedback](#)
- 8 [Feedback from drop-in sessions](#)
- 9 [Digest of Social Media comments](#)