

Public

***Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council
Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol Castell-nedd***

***Democratic Services
Gwasanaethau Democrataidd***

Chief Executive: K.Jones

Date: 19th January 2023

Dear Member,

CABINET - THURSDAY, 19TH JANUARY, 2023

Please find attached the following information which is in relation to the Consultation for the 2023/2024 Budget Proposals, which are for consideration at the next meeting of the **Cabinet - Thursday, 19th January, 2023.**

Item

5. **2023/2024 Budget proposals for consultation (Pages 1 - 8)**

Yours sincerely

p.p Chief Executive

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Let's Talk Budget

Consultation on Neath Port Talbot Council's Budget proposals for 2023/24

All councils in England and Wales have to deliver a balanced budget by law. In Wales the 2023/24 budgets must be set by 11 March 2023.

Like councils across the whole of the UK, the financial position for Neath Port Talbot Council is one of the most, if not the most, challenging we have ever faced.

The estimated budget gap for the council next year is almost £24m - more than any single year gap faced through the recent period of austerity.

The combined impact of the war in Ukraine, the Covid pandemic and Brexit has resulted in a number of pressures for the council, just as it has for businesses and households:

- Energy prices and energy security - we estimate energy costs for the council to rise by 162% in 2023/24 (approx. £8 million).
- Inflation has already reached levels not seen since the 1980s – affecting contract and other costs, as well as contributing to a cost of living crisis across all of our communities.
- The UK Government has increased the National Living Wage by 10% and is set to increase it by a similar figure in 2023/24.
- Ongoing supply chain disruptions are adding to cost pressures.
- Income levels have been affected by the pandemic, with many residents having made significant changes to their lifestyles – this is particularly affecting theatres, car parks and leisure services where the number of paying customers is yet to return to pre-pandemic levels.
- The labour market is far more competitive with post-pandemic unemployment rates at very low levels and more employers seeking to fill jobs than there are people looking for work. This is placing pressure on recruitment and retention with consequential implications for pay and our wider employment offer.
- On a positive note, the county borough is also seeing an unprecedented level of investor interest from existing and new investors. Whilst very welcome, this is placing considerable pressure on Planning, Economic Development and other regulatory services.

As a council, we are doing and will continue to do everything we can to save money and protect the services we all rely on. We have identified significant savings, but these alone are not enough to close the budget gap for 2023/24, so are proposing a number of options to balance the budget in 2023/24. We would welcome your views on these.

The closing date for responses to this consultation is midnight on **Friday 10 February 2023**.

Questionnaire

Q1 Please indicate which of the following describes you (*please ✓ all that apply*)

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> I live in Neath Port Talbot | <input type="checkbox"/> I am in school |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I work for Neath Port Talbot Council | <input type="checkbox"/> I am an unpaid carer |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I am a member of the Armed Forces | <input type="checkbox"/> I am a college/university student |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I am an Armed Forces Veteran | <input type="checkbox"/> I use services provided by NPT Council |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I work in Neath Port Talbot | <input type="checkbox"/> I am a NPTCBC elected member/AS/MP /community councillor |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I am unemployed | <input type="checkbox"/> I work for a third sector or voluntary organisation in NPT |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I own/run a business in Neath Port Talbot | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I am retired | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I am a volunteer in Neath Port Talbot | |

Other (please specify):

Q2 Our budget strategy is based on 5 key objectives. Please indicate to what extent you agree with these:

| | Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree | Don't Know |
|---|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Maintaining a clear focus on recovery from Covid-19 | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Supporting our communities through the cost of living crisis | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Facilitating and enabling economic growth | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Delivering local and Welsh Government policy priorities | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Ensuring a sustainable council – <i>i.e. the council will need a robust strategy to transform the way services and functions are delivered, whilst also ensuring financial sustainability and good governance</i> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

Q2a If you have answered **disagree** or **strongly disagree** to any of the above, please can you tell us why:

General Reserves:

As part of the budget strategy for 2023/24 it is proposed to use £3.5m of the council's general reserves to balance the budget.

We expect the growth in demand for services to reach a peak in 2023/24. We hope to also be able to make a clearer assessment as to whether the increased demand and need we are currently responding to will return to pre-pandemic levels and the timescale over which this might occur, or alternatively, whether we will experience a (semi) permanent increase in the activity and cost base.

Q3 How do you feel about the proposal to use £3.5 million from general reserves to balance the budget in 2023/24?

Strongly Agree

Agree

Disagree

Strongly Disagree

Don't Know

Q3a If you have answered **disagree** or **strongly disagree** to question 3, please can you tell us why:

Specific Reserves:

In February 2022, the previous administration agreed, with wide support from across the political parties, to return indoor leisure services (currently run by Celtic Leisure) to the council's direct management.

Since then costs have sharply escalated, increasing the funding gap beyond that reported at the point the decision was taken by Members. A number of options for addressing this are being developed as part of the budget setting process.

It is proposed to utilise £1.4m from specific reserves to help meet the cost of running indoor leisure services whilst further options are developed.

Q4 How do you feel about the proposal to use £1.4 million from specific reserves to help meet the cost of running indoor leisure services whilst further options are developed?

Strongly Agree

Agree

Disagree

Strongly Disagree

Don't Know

Q4a If you have answered **disagree** or **strongly disagree** to question 4, please can you tell us why:

Council Tax:

In his Autumn Statement, the Chancellor of the Exchequer made clear that he has based his spending plans on councils raising council tax by 5%.

Even with all of the measures identified, and after the use of £4.9m reserves there still remains a budget gap for 2023/24, so as part of this consultation it is proposed that we will need to increase council tax by 4.5% to run council services in Neath Port Talbot next year.

This includes:

- an increase of 1.8% to cover the increased contribution which needs to be made to maintain the current level of Fire and Rescue Services – this is a cost over which the council has no control;
- an increase of 2% to help keep indoor leisure facilities open in 2023/24;
- increasing council tax to provide placements for children with additional learning needs.

A 4.5% increase on council tax would be equivalent to the following per month:

| Monthly Increase | | |
|------------------|------------------|-------------------|
| - Band A = £4.15 | - Band D = £6.23 | - Band G = £10.38 |
| - Band B = £4.84 | - Band E = £7.61 | - Band H = £12.45 |
| - Band C = £5.53 | - Band F = £8.99 | - Band I = £14.53 |

Q5 How do you feel about the proposal to increase council tax by 4.5% next year?

Strongly Agree

Agree

Disagree

Strongly Disagree

Don't Know

Q5a Please give the reason(s) for your response to question 5:

Q6 As part of a strategy to reduce costs, the council is proposing to close a number of satellite buildings and relocate staff from these to the main civic centres - do you agree with this proposal?

Strongly Agree

Agree

Disagree

Strongly Disagree

Don't Know

Q6a If you have answered **disagree** or **strongly disagree** to question 6, please can you tell us why:

Q7 Energy costs are anticipated to rise by 162% in 2023/24, and the council is looking for ways to reduce energy consumption - do you agree that the council should do this?

Strongly Agree

Agree

Disagree

Strongly Disagree

Don't Know

Q7a If you have answered **disagree** or **strongly disagree** to question 7, please can you tell us why:

Q7b Do you have any ideas or suggestions on how the council could reduce energy consumption:

Q8 Do you have any other suggestions on how the council can reduce the budget gap?
(this could be through efficiency savings, income generation, or any other ideas you might have):

Q9 Would our Draft Budget 2023/24 proposals have an impact on you and/or your family because of your and/or their:

| | Yes | No | Don't Know | | Yes | No | Don't Know |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Age | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | Race | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Disability | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | Religion or belief | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Gender Reassignment | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | Sex | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Marriage or Civil Partnership | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | Sexual orientation | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Pregnancy or maternity | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | | | | |

Q9a If yes, please explain why:

Q10 What effect do you think our Draft Budget 2023/24 proposals will have on:

| | Positive | No effect | Negative | Don't Know |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| People's opportunities to use the Welsh Language | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

Q10a Please give the reason(s) for your response to question 10:

Q11 Do you have any other views on our Draft Budget 2023/24 proposals that you would like to share with us?

About You - Finally, please could tell us some information about yourself.

Q12 Please provide your **full postcode** below (e.g. SA13 1PJ). This allows us to more accurately pinpoint respondents' views and needs by area, and to make sure we've heard from people in all parts of the county borough:-

Equalities - The council operates equality policies that aim to ensure that everyone is treated fairly and equally. To make sure that people are not discriminated against when accessing our services we carry out monitoring and therefore would be grateful if you could answer the following questions. The information you provide is strictly confidential.

Q13 What is your age? *(please ✓ one answer)*

- | | | | | |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|---|
| <input type="radio"/> Under 16 | <input type="radio"/> 25-29 | <input type="radio"/> 40-49 | <input type="radio"/> 60-74 | <input type="radio"/> 86+ |
| <input type="radio"/> 17-24 | <input type="radio"/> 30-39 | <input type="radio"/> 50-59 | <input type="radio"/> 75-85 | <input type="radio"/> Prefer not to say |

Q14 Welsh Language – are you: *(please ✓ one answer)*

- | | | |
|--|---|--|
| <input type="radio"/> Fluent speaker & writer | <input type="radio"/> Fluent speaker | <input type="radio"/> Learner |
| <input type="radio"/> Fairly fluent speaker & writer | <input type="radio"/> Fairly fluent speaker | <input type="radio"/> Little or no knowledge |

Q15 Are you pregnant or on maternity leave?

- | | | |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Yes | No | Prefer not to say |
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

The Equality Act 2010 defines a person as disabled if they have a physical or mental impairment, which has a substantial and long term (i.e. has lasted or is expected to last at least 12 months) adverse effect on the person's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.

Q16 Do you consider yourself to have a disability? *(please ✓ one answer)*

- | | | |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Yes | No | Prefer not to say |
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

Q17 Ethnic origin: *(please ✓ one answer)*

- | | | |
|--|--|---|
| <input type="radio"/> White British | <input type="radio"/> Indian | <input type="radio"/> Chinese |
| <input type="radio"/> White Irish | <input type="radio"/> Bangladeshi | <input type="radio"/> Prefer not to say |
| <input type="radio"/> Mixed: White & Black Caribbean | <input type="radio"/> Pakistani | <input type="radio"/> Gypsy & Traveller communities |
| <input type="radio"/> Mixed: White & Black African | <input type="radio"/> Black: African | <input type="radio"/> Other Ethnic Group |
| <input type="radio"/> Mixed: White & Asian | <input type="radio"/> Black: Caribbean | |

Q17a Other Ethnic Group (please specify):

Q17b Gypsy and Traveller communities - please specify

- Irish Traveller Roma Showperson
 New Traveller Romani Gypsy Other

Q17c Other Gypsy and Traveller communities - please specify:

Q18 Sex: (please ✓ one answer)

- Male Transgender Prefer not to say
 Female Non-binary Other

Q18a Other (please specify):

Q19 Sexual Orientation (please ✓ one answer)

- Heterosexual Gay Prefer not to say
 Lesbian Bisexual Other

Q19a Other (please specify):

Q20 Religion/Belief: (please ✓ one answer)

- Christian Jewish No religion
 Buddhist Muslim Prefer not to say
 Hindu Sikh Other religion

Q20a Other religion (please specify):

Q21 Nationality (please ✓ one answer)

- Welsh British Other
 Scottish Irish
 English Prefer not to say

Q21a Other nationality (please specify):

Fair Funding For Neath Port Talbot Petition

Please could we ask one more thing of you? The trade unions are calling for Fair Funding for Neath Port Talbot, to help protect the services we all rely on such as schools, social care, refuse and recycling etc. Please consider adding your name to this and encourage others to do so as well. Go to www.npt.gov.uk/unisonpetition. Similar campaigns have made a real difference in the past.

We are aiming for 10,000 signatures to try and get a debate in the Senedd.

Thank you for your time