

Let's Talk Summary Report Final

Consultation on the Draft Corporate Plan 2022-27 and the Draft Budget Proposals 2022-23

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Introduction

This report summarises the headline findings from the questionnaire on the Draft Corporate Plan 2022-27 and the Draft Budget Proposals 2022-23.

The questionnaire was intended to test whether the Draft Corporate Plan has captured what is important to people now and in the future (as identified in the 'Let's Talk' engagement activity in 2020) in terms of the changes we aim to make over the next 12 months, the next 5 years and the longer term, combined with the public consultation on a proposed 0% council tax rise and the other budget investment proposals for 2022-23.

The consultation ran for four weeks (from Wednesday 5 January to Tuesday 1 February 2022) and the questionnaire received **485 responses**, plus three written responses from groups and organisations.

The consultation took place against the backdrop of a revised version of alert level 2 restrictions, which came into place on Boxing Day 2021 to respond to the highly contagious omicron variant of Covid-19. The following arrangements were made to help ensure that the consultation was as inclusive as possible, despite the challenging situation:

- **Online questionnaire** - a self-completion questionnaire was published on the council's website. The questionnaire was live from Wednesday 5 January (following Cabinet approval) until midnight on Tuesday 1 February 2022.
- **Email** – the email address LetsTalk@npt.gov.uk was promoted for people who wanted to respond via this mechanism.
- **Offline** – for public health reasons, we adapted our usual practice of making printed questionnaires and reference documents available in public buildings. Instead we:
 - produced and distributed more than 1,100 printed packs and questionnaires for those who are not online. The packs contained an English and Welsh copy of the questionnaire for people to complete in the safety of their own home and return using a pre-paid envelope. These were:
 - made available at our 8 council run libraries (Neath, Pontardawe, Port Talbot, Baglan, Cwmafan, Glynneath, Sandfields, Skewen)
 - distributed by Local Area Co-ordinators and members of the Community of Practice (a group made up of officers from across the council who undertake engagement activities as part of their roles)
 - distributed by The Home Library Service, whilst delivering books and information to residents who have difficulty, or who are unable to visit their local library

- distributed by Tai Tarian to their Haven schemes for people over 55 - there are 15 of these schemes across the county borough in Cwmafan, Port Talbot, Sandfields, Briton Ferry, Neath, Cadoxton, Crynant, Tonna, Glynneath, Banwen, Ystalyfera, Pontardawe (x 2), Cwmgors, Gwaun Cae Gurwen
- made printed questionnaires available to employees in a number of internal services including the catering and cleaning services and the Service Response Centre at the Quays.

Almost a quarter of the responses we received (24.1% /117) were submitted via printed copies.

The consultation was promoted online (via: regular social media activity on corporate and service accounts, email marketing, and internal council channels), offline (via: radio, press releases, and posters), and by outreach activity via NPT Community of Practice on Involvement and Engagement.

Section 1 - Consultation on the Draft Corporate Plan 2022-27

1. What questionnaire respondents said about the proposed objective 'All Children get the best start in life'

- 1.1 Most respondents (80% / 382) "agreed" or "strongly agreed" with the proposed objective 'All Children get the best start in life', 18% (84) "disagreed" or "strongly disagreed", and the remaining 3% (13) didn't know.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't know
All children get the best start in life	63% (300)	17% (82)	12% (57)	6% (27)	3% (13)

- 1.2 When asked to consider a list of changes the council is proposing to focus on in the next 12 months and longer term, most people (around three-quarters - 76% / 364) agreed that all of them are the right things to focus on to respond to what children and young people said matters to them. A further 21% (101) agreed or disagreed with some of them, less than 1% (2) disagreed with all of them and 2% (10) didn't know.

- 1.3 There were 157 responses to the question on whether there was anything missing from the changes we are proposing to focus on in terms of giving children and young people the best start in life'. The key areas identified for amendments to the draft plan were as follows:

- the need to clarify that the reference to 'Keep schools open' is specifically in relation to the impact of the pandemic
- comments relating to the importance/need for "free and low cost" play and leisure opportunities for children and young people
- the need for young people leaving care to have supported transition to enable them to access and sustain appropriate accommodation
- the importance of placements with local companies for young adults
- the need for the appropriate training and arrangements to in place for those delivering support services for children with ALN

2. What questionnaire respondents said about the proposed objective 'Communities are Thriving and Sustainable'

- 2.1 The majority of respondents (71% / 232) "agreed" or "strongly agreed" with the proposed objective 'Communities are thriving and sustainable', 26% (121) "disagreed" or "strongly disagreed", and the remaining 4% (17) didn't know.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't know
Communities are thriving and sustainable	46% (210)	25% (113)	18% (85)	8% (36)	4% (17)

2.2 When asked to consider a list of changes the council is proposing to focus on in the next 12 months and longer term, more than three-quarters (79% / 369) agreed that all of them are the right things to focus on to respond to what children and young people said matters to them. A further 17% (78) agreed or disagreed with some of them, 1% (6) disagreed with all of them and 3% (13) didn't know.

2.3 There were 150 responses to the question on whether there was anything missing from the changes we are proposing to focus on in terms of 'communities are thriving and sustainable'. The key areas identified for amendments to the draft plan were as follows:

- Comments around the importance of libraries for communities
- The importance of support to access and use the internet
- Comments on the importance of meeting the needs of people who need care and support

3. What questionnaire respondents said about the proposed objective 'Our environment, heritage and culture'

3.1 Most respondents (85% / 389) "agreed" or "strongly agreed" with the proposed objective 'Our Environment, Heritage and Culture', 12% (55) "disagreed" or "strongly disagreed", and the remaining 4% (17) didn't know.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't know
Our environment, heritage and culture can be enjoyed by future generations	44% (202)	41% (187)	8% (36)	4% (19)	4% (17)

3.2 When asked to consider a list of changes the council is proposing to focus on in the next 12 months and longer term, more than three-quarters (79% / 366) agreed that all of them are the right things to focus on to respond to what people said matters to them about our environment, heritage and culture. A further 16% (78) agreed or disagreed with some of them, 1% (6) disagreed with all of them and 3% (14) didn't know.

3.3 There were 138 responses to the question on whether there was anything missing from the changes we are proposing to focus on in terms of our environment, heritage and culture. The key areas identified for amendments to the draft plan were as follows:

- Comments on the need for environment, heritage and culture learning opportunities to be available to all age groups, not just children and young people
- Comments on the need for a stronger focus on tackling climate change
- Comments on the importance of and the need for investment in leisure facilities/opportunities

4. What questionnaire respondents said about the proposed objective 'Jobs and Skills'

4.1 The majority of respondents (71% / 326) "agreed" or "strongly agreed" with the proposed objective 'Jobs and Skills', 24% (109) "disagreed" or "strongly disagreed", and the remaining 6% (26) didn't know.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't know
Local people are skilled and can access high quality, green jobs	40% (183)	31% (143)	16% (72)	8% (37)	6% (26)

4.2 When asked to consider a list of changes the council is proposing to focus on in the next 12 months and longer term, most respondents (85% / 386) agreed that all of them are the right things to focus on to respond to what people said matters to them about jobs and skills. A further 11% (50) agreed or disagreed with some of them, 1% (4) disagreed with all of them and 4% (16) didn't know.

4.4 There were 95 responses to the question on whether there was anything missing from the changes we are proposing to focus on in terms of jobs and skills. The key areas identified for amendments to the draft plan were as follows:

- Comments around the need for green innovation and jobs
- Comments on the need to engage with/support local businesses in a number of areas - e.g. local supply chain; filling vacancies; apprentices; financial support etc.
- Comments on the importance of improving transport
- The importance of internet access, speed and reliability for business
- More emphasis on the valley communities

5. Other views on the Draft Corporate Plan

5.1 We asked if respondents had any other views on 'Recover, Reset, Renew' our Draft Corporate Plan that they would like to share with us. There were 116. Many of the points raised have been covered in the feedback on the 4 wellbeing objectives, but in addition there were some comments on the draft plan in general. Examples of positive and negative comments were as follows:

Examples of positive comments:

- *"Draft corporate plan seems robust, hopefully there will be regular reviews re progress made"*
- *"Great to see the match between what the public want and what the Council aim to deliver"*
- *"This plan looks to be an exciting opportunity for a fresh start after a tremendously difficult 2 years. Whilst I might not agree with all of the proposals, the plan as a whole looks great. Bring it on!"*
- *"It would be good if we have regular updates on the difference the plan is making"*
- *"Ambitious - lets do it. Let us know if we can help"*

Examples of negative comments:

- *"the plan is far too long and unwieldy to expect people to read through and digest in one sitting. I think you should have broken it down into smaller sections and run a consultation on each so that we can look at the detail"*
- *"most of these should already be in place"*
- *"Proposals are all well and good but unless there is a commitment to deliver these they are just a pipe dream"*
- *"I'm not sure it's ambitious enough. It feels solid and safe. I'm not sure "solid" and "safe" will encourage recovery or jump-start a greater sense of community or ambition within Neath Port Talbot."*
- *"Stop talking and get on with it!"*

Examples of mixed comments:

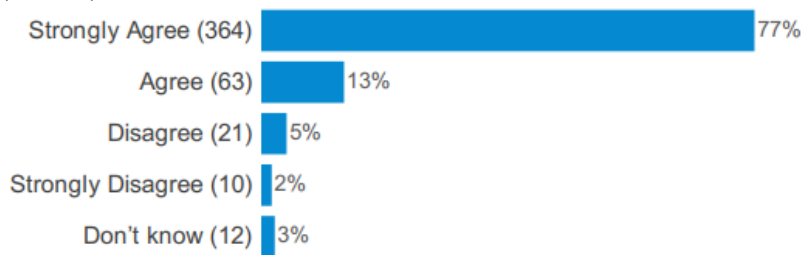
- *"It sounds great but seeing whether it can be implemented in a reasonable timeframe will be interesting. Is it deliverable?"*
- *"Generally a good plan, but with the highest rates in the country, we should be having the best services..And the practice of replacing publicly funded services with funding from the side and the expectation that volunteers will pick up the slack is wrong"*
- *"This plan is OK, but it's hopelessly unambitious in the key area of transport and digital connectivity. In the middle of a climate emergency and a pandemic, I would have expected more."*
- *"Let's make this a reality and not another talking shop!!! People will support change and want to see this plan work!!!"*

Section 2 - Budget consultation responses

6. Council Tax

6.1 We asked respondents how they feel about the proposal that there should be 0% increase to council tax in 2022/23.

Figure 6: Responses to the question 'how do you feel about the proposal that there should be 0% increase to council tax in 2022/23?' (base: 470)



6.2 Where people indicated that they “disagreed” or “strongly disagreed”, we asked them to tell us why. There were 30 responses, including the following themes:

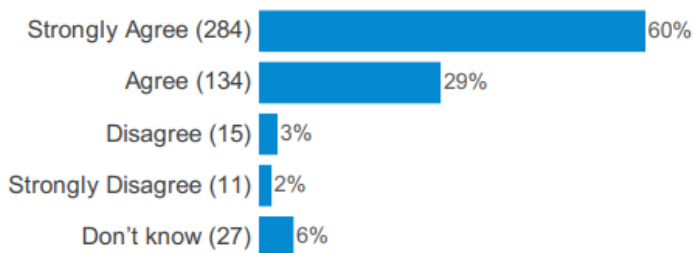
- 12 respondents felt a small/modest increase to council tax should be implemented
- 9 didn't specify that they would support a rise, but made the point that services have to be paid for
- 5 respondents felt that there should be a decrease in council tax – reasons for this included that people are struggling financially because of covid, the perceived high level of council tax in NPT compared to other areas, comments around VFM for council tax paid

7. Best Start in Life (Budget - £700,000)

This proposal would increase community based and specialist youth service provision, early intervention and prevention activities (including educational psychology and key worker support for children and young people affected by the pandemic), extra support for children with additional learning needs and an increase in adult community learning provisions to support people in the journey back to work.

7.1 We asked respondents how they feel about the proposals to invest an additional £700,000 in services to support the 'Best Start in Life'

Figure 7: Responses to the question 'how do you feel about the proposals to invest an additional £700,000 in services to support the 'Best Start in Life'?' (base: 471):



7.2 Where people indicated that they “disagreed” or “strongly disagreed”, we asked them to tell us why. There were 20 responses, including the following themes:

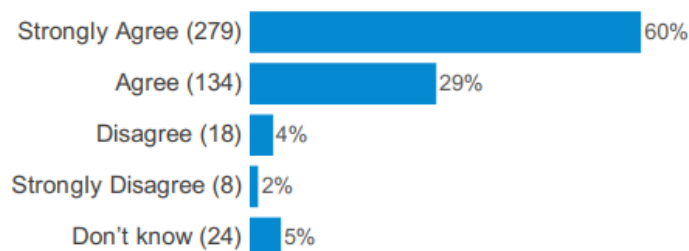
- 6 felt that the proposed amount of £700,000 is insufficient
- 4 commented that there is already a lot of support in this area, or thought there were more important/other areas to concentrate on
- 3 felt that the council should be doing this anyway
- 2 commented that money should be used to further reduce bills/council tax bills

8. Thriving and Sustainable Communities (Budget - £1.2 million)

One of the key messages from 'Let's Talk' was how much people value the environment and neighbourhoods where they live and work. In the pandemic, the council has had to re-prioritise neighbourhood services to ensure continuity of priority services like refuse and recycling collection. To re-address the issue it's proposed a range of proposals are developed to deliver a county borough wide range of highly visible projects to 'catch up, clean up and green up' our neighbourhoods.

- 8.1 We asked respondents how they feel about the proposals to invest an additional £1.2 million in services to support 'Thriving and Sustainable Communities'

Figure 8: Responses to the question 'how do you feel about the proposals to invest an additional £1.2 million in services to support 'Thriving and Sustainable Communities'? (base: 463):



- 8.2 Where people indicated that they "disagreed" or "strongly disagreed", we asked them to tell us why. There were 20 responses, including the following themes:

- 7 suggested other areas that might be a better use for the money
- 5 commented that it was a waste of funds and/or that money should be used to further reduce bills/council tax bills

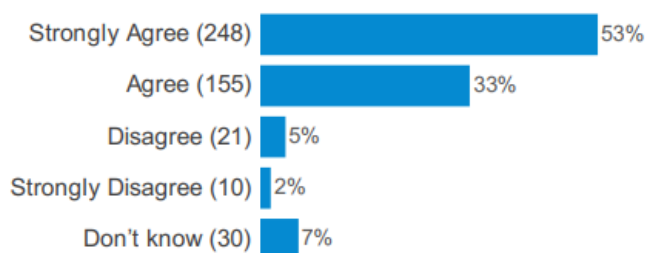
9. Culture and Heritage / Jobs and Skills (Budget - £200,000)

It is proposed strategies be developed in relation to both culture and environment, leisure and tourism so further proposals can be developed in relation to jobs and skills.

The 2022/23 budget pressure schedule includes for additional long term funding to provide additional support for economic development and regeneration which will be key for supporting existing businesses as well as attracting further inward investment into the county borough.

- 9.1 We asked respondents how they feel about the proposal to invest an additional £200,000 in services to support 'Culture and Heritage / Jobs and Skills'?

Figure 9: Responses to the question 'how do you feel about the proposals to invest an additional £200,000 in services to support 'Culture and Heritage / Jobs and Skills'? (base: 464):



- 9.2 Where people indicated that they disagreed or strongly disagreed, we asked them to tell us why. There were 22 responses, including the following themes:

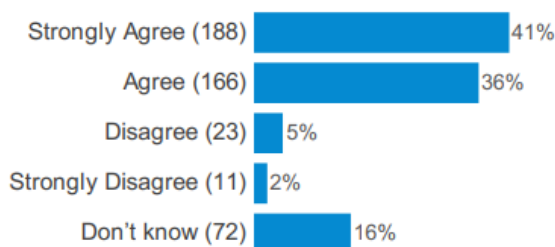
- 16 felt that the proposed amount of £200,000 is insufficient
- 2 felt that the money needs to be spent effectively and/or the outcomes monitored

10. Covid recovery reserve (Budget - £2.8m)

In order to fund these one off investments outlined above, we are proposing to re-purpose £2.8m of the current insurance reserve into a Covid recovery reserve. This will fund the 3 proposals outlined, and leave £700k unallocated to support further investments.

- 10.1 We asked respondents how they feel about the proposals to re-purpose £2.8m of the current insurance reserve into a Covid recovery reserve to fund the one-off investments outlined above.

Figure 10: Responses to the question 'how do you feel about the proposal to re-purpose £2.8m of the current insurance reserve into a Covid recovery reserve to fund the one-off investments outlined above? (base: 460):



10.2 Where people indicated that they disagreed or strongly disagreed, we asked them to tell us why. There were 24 responses, covering a range of reasons, but the following themes were included:

- 5 questioned using reserves/thought that money should be used for the purpose it was originally set aside for
- 4 felt that there are already sources of funding for covid recovery outside of the council
- 2 questioned where the money would be spent

11. Other views

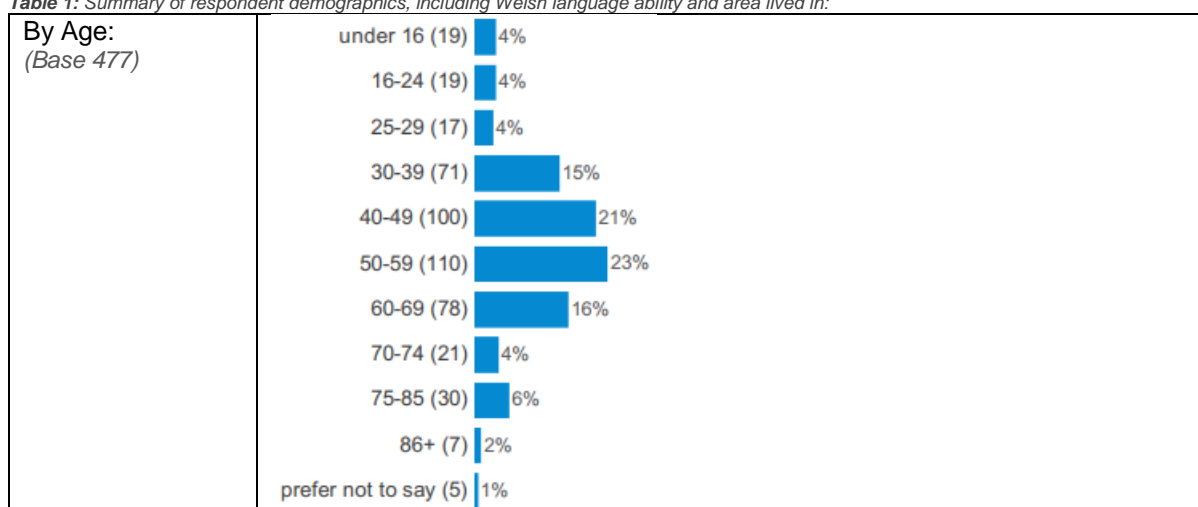
11.1 We asked respondents 'do you have any other views on our draft Budget 2022/23 that you would like to share with us?' There were 97 responses, including the following themes:

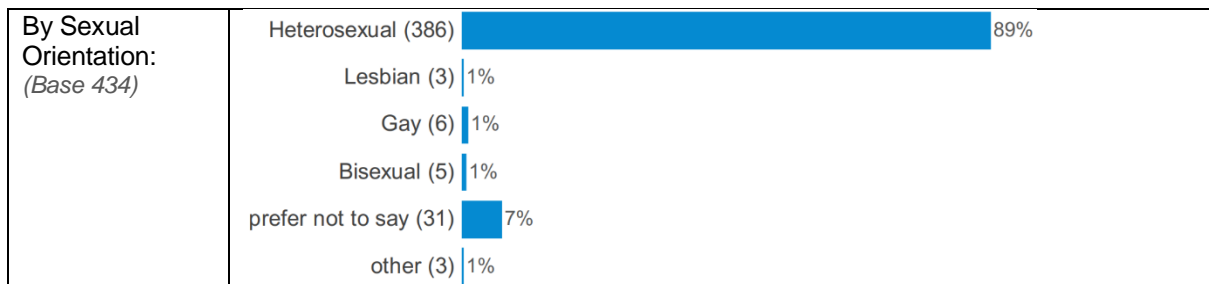
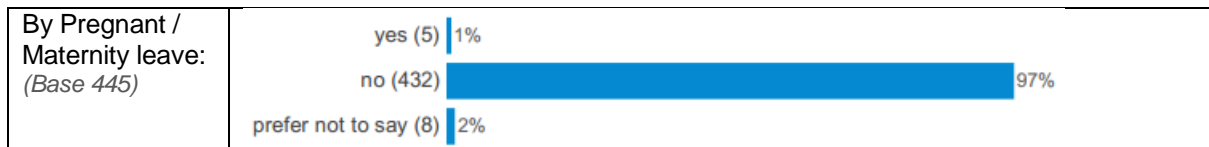
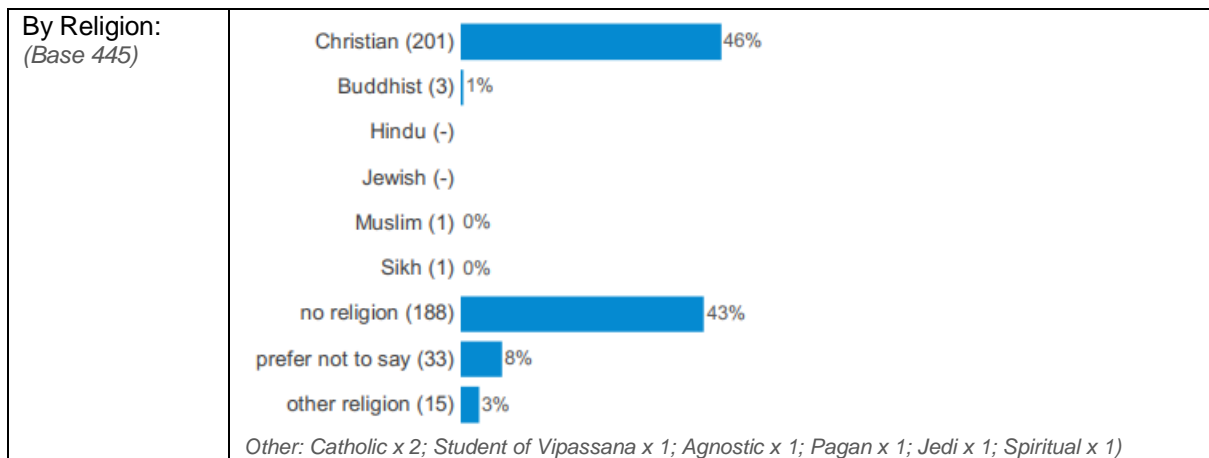
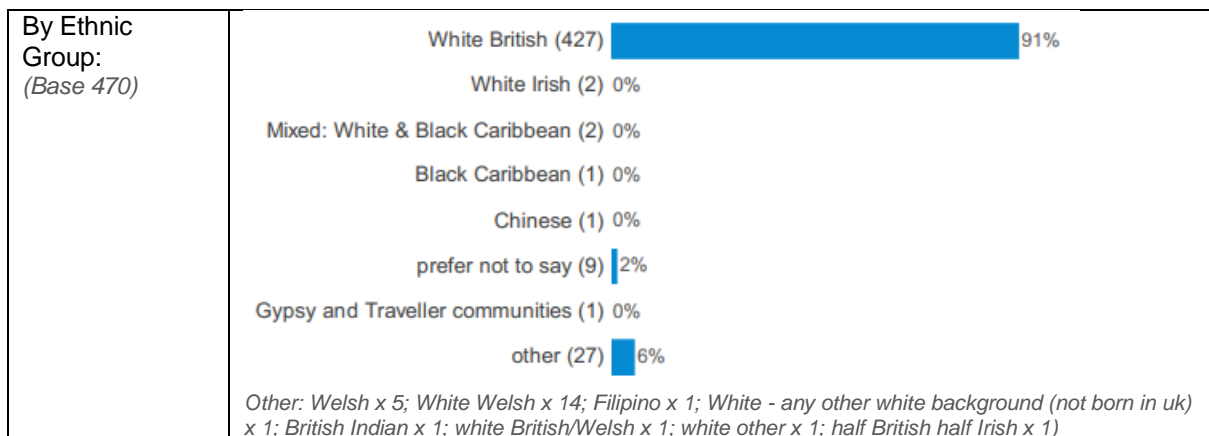
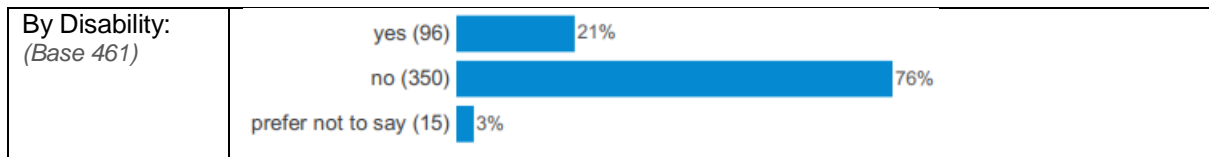
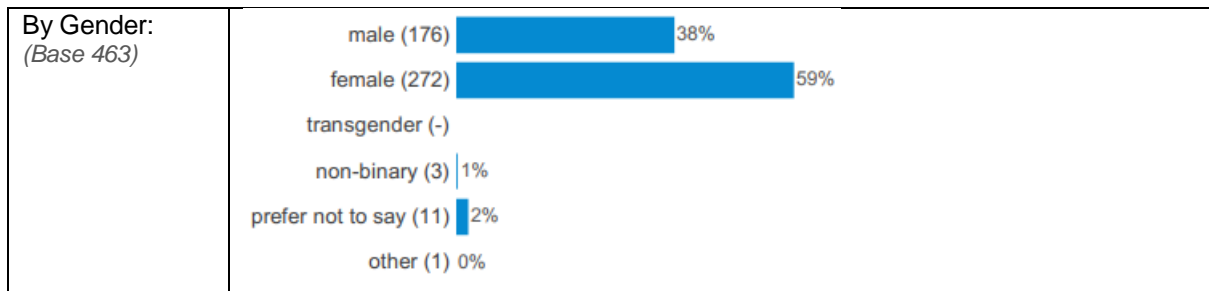
- There were 20 comments relating to council tax – 11 agreeing with the proposal to freeze council tax for 2022-23; 6 saying that it should be reduced; 2 in favour of a slight increase; 1 commenting that council tax should not have increased in 21/22
- 8 expressed a view that some of the 'one-off investments to support covid recovery' were not enough – 5 for culture & heritage/jobs & skills; 3 for 'best start in life'
- 5 outlined the need for services which would support mental health
- 5 commented on the importance of investing in council staff
- 5 outlined the importance of investing in neighbourhood and streets – including cleaning, roads, lighting
- 3 commented on the importance of leisure facilities and parks
- 3 commented on the need for investment in protecting the environment/nature recovery

Who responded

The response profile to the questionnaire is summarised below.

Table 1: Summary of respondent demographics, including Welsh language ability and area lived in:





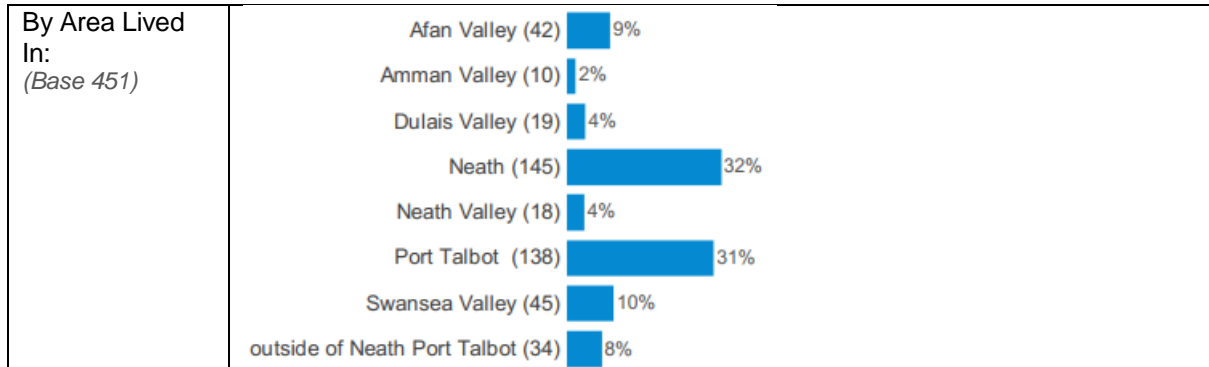
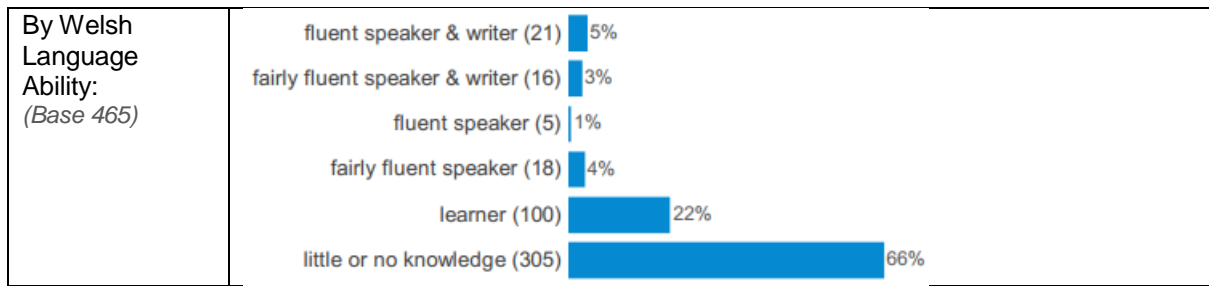
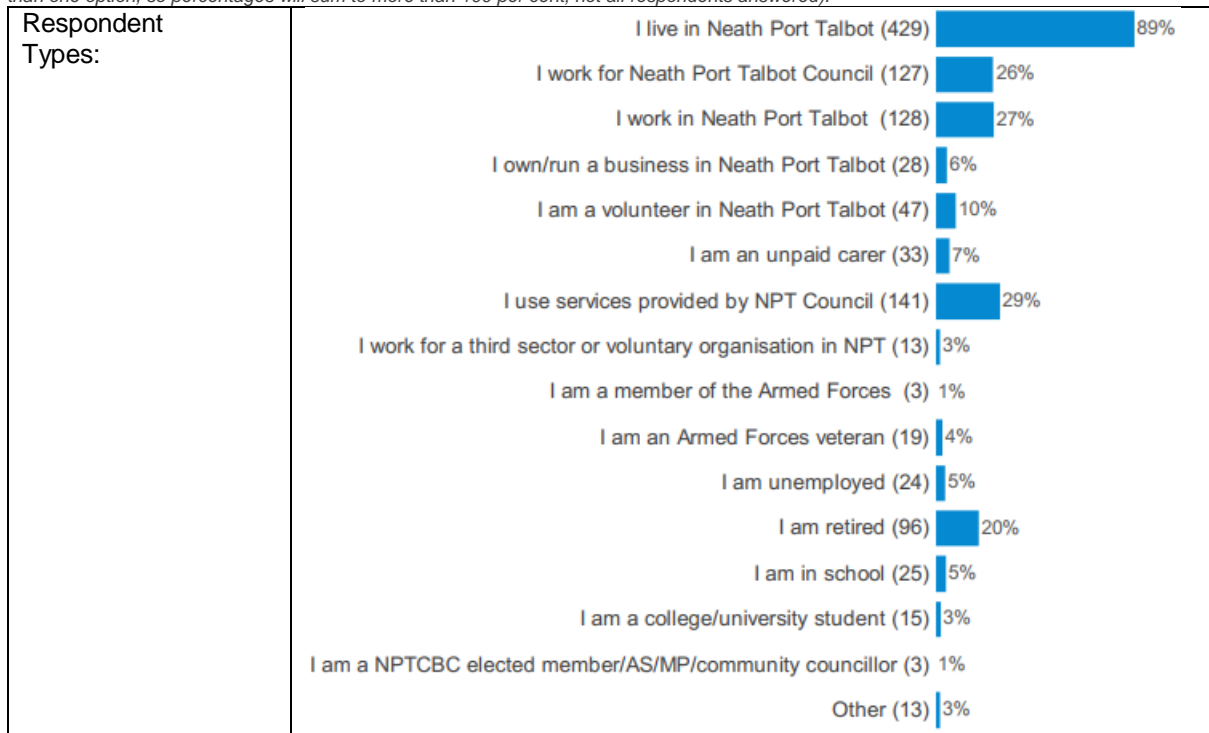


Table 2: Summary of the ways in which respondents described themselves and their relationship to NPT (NB respondents could choose more than one option, so percentages will sum to more than 100 per cent; not all respondents answered).



Responses from Groups and Partners

Three formal responses were received and a summary of issues raised are as follows:

NRW:

- Share the council's vision for continued working together as we progress through the recovery and renewal phases of the pandemic.
- Would encourage the sustainability question to pervade all decision making across all 4 wellbeing objectives.
- Point out that the impacts of climate change will be relevant across all wellbeing objectives and we must also ensure that we are resilient to the anticipated risks that a changing climate will bring.

- Best start – NRW highlights that the natural environment can play an important part in the early years development of our children and the county offers significant opportunities for outdoor learning with added value of connecting young people to their local communities and environment. The links between outdoor green space and blue space/wild play opportunities and physical and mental wellbeing in young people are well documented. Action is needed to secure adequate provision of safe, accessible natural green spaces.
- Thriving communities – NRW supports the asset based approach and welcomes action to “clean up and green up”, recognising the important role of a high quality local environment. Often social and environmental inequities go hand in hand - some of the most deprived communities are also areas of poorer environmental quality and will often be home to those who are most vulnerable to the risks of climate change. Targeting these areas will derive greatest benefits. In developing greater community resilience there will be opportunities to build in nature based solutions. NRW also supports action around place making and high quality/low carbon housing. Active travel links, as well as improved public transport should feature as a fundamental consideration of better connectivity within and between communities.
- Natural and Cultural heritage, suggests there is perhaps merit in more overt recognition of the actions required under Biodiversity Duty Plan in the actions section. This plan will also be a relevant consideration under the other objectives.
- Jobs and skills – NRW support the focus on sustainable, well paid “green” jobs and the action to develop the decarbonisation and renewable energy sectors and suggests that part of this should see the development of the circular economy and shortening of supply chains. Interventions may provide the opportunity for delivering multiple benefits, for the economy, communities and the environment. NRW also feels it is positive to see a link to provision of good transport hubs and connections between home and work. Similarly, active travel routes provide opportunities to deliver health and wellbeing, environmental as well as connectivity benefits.
- Whilst NRW feels the plan recognises that the natural environment of the county provides significant economic opportunities, their response points out a need to ensure that the environment is protected and improved (i.e. sustainable management) to secure these natural assets in the long term.

Pobl Group:

- Feels the plan is ambitious and inspiring and that the four pillars around which its structured make good sense.
- Recognises the organisational challenge will be resourcing and creating wider ownership and specific accountability and welcomes the fact that the council talks about partners throughout the document as the achievement of many of the aims will need a ‘shared endeavour’ approach.
- States that some of the enabling actions in the plan in terms of offering small grants to community groups to take some ownership can also be extremely powerful, and suggests that the decarbonisation aims could embrace the education and involvement of citizens more widely beyond the Councils own carbon footprint.

Gwynfi Miners Community Hall:

- Particularly welcomes proposals to increase youth and outdoor leisure services to boost the wellbeing of young people, as well as providing new funding for schools to support children with additional learning needs.
- Also to strengthen support for vulnerable people, including those who have become lonely and isolated due to the pandemic and also increase the number of neighbourhood teams as part of a drive to catch up, clean up and green up towns and villages.
- Highlights that, through a massive and sustained local community effort, some of the services that the council had withdrawn have been restored (due to local groups and individuals in the Upper Afan Valley securing grants and donations annually). They feel that this is not sustainable and council support is needed to have thriving and sustainable communities across Neath Port Talbot.

- Highlights that their community has been one of the hardest hit by the effects of austerity and that as a disadvantaged and low income community, they have borne an excessive burden of the Covid pandemic and inequalities across Neath Port Talbot have widened, but feels it is not at all clear in the budget proposals how addressing these inequalities will be met as there are no clear programmes identified to achieve this.
- Calls for a physical infrastructure of buildings and people if the Council is to be able to deliver on its draft vision of “**community support**”, “**early intervention and prevention**” as well as boosting tourist and local enterprise and to deliver schemes such as “**the Summer of Fun**”.
- Believes the following steps are urgently needed:-
 - provide guaranteed grant support for staff in our existing community centres. Without this support it will be impossible have the facilities from which priorities such as social isolation, promoting the wellbeing of our young people or community recovery can be delivered.
 - review the physical fabric of these facilities with a view to their remediation.
 - provide more support for outdoor sports facilities to complement the excellent voluntary work that is already taking places.
 - review existing patterns of public transport to make it easier for people to get to work, education, public services and amenities that are available to more affluent communities in urban locations..
 - work with local businesses and groups to improve the tourist and leisure opportunities that exist in the Upper Afan as an important economic driver.
 - invest in the good upkeep and cleanliness of our public spaces and work with the local voluntary groups that are doing excellent work in this regard.