

Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council

Council

Report of the Corporate Directors Group

2nd March 2023

Matter for decision

Wards affected – All

2023/24 Revenue budget proposals

Purpose of Report

To seek Cabinet approval for the proposed Council 2023/24 revenue budget including investment in services, investments from reserves, budget solutions and proposed council tax levels.

The report also seeks to agree a set of principles for setting fees and charges for Council services in 2023-24.

Background

Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council's ("the Council") net revenue budget requirement for 2022/23 totals £338m and when grants and income are taken into account, this means the Council's gross budget invests over c£500m in services across the County Borough.

Every year, the Council has a duty to consult and set a budget for the provision of services. This report details the proposed 2023/24 revenue budget. A separate report, setting out the proposed Council capital programme for 2023/24 to 2026/27, is also presented for members' approval at today's meeting.

On the 5th January 2023, Cabinet approved a public consultation process on the draft budget for 2023/24, including a proposed 4.5% increase in Council Tax; investment from general reserves of £3.5m; a contribution from specific reserves of £1.4m to part fund the cost of

indoor leisure services; and a proposition to review fees and charges in line with inflation - a working assumption being that all fees and charges would increase by 10% in 2023-24.

Circa. 1,000 people participated in the public consultation exercise and the feedback received has been carefully considered to further develop the budget options. This report now sets out the final revenue budget proposals for 2023-24 for consideration by the Cabinet.

Strategic Context

The Public Sector has faced a sustained period of real term reductions in funding levels for over ten years with Neath Port Talbot Council securing reductions in the revenue budget of circa £90 million in real terms since 2008. As well as finding genuine efficiencies and economies in the cost of services and functions, as has been the case in other councils, the scale of austerity measures imposed by the UK Government has also seen deep cuts in services and jobs, particularly in those services delivered under discretionary powers.

When the Council set its budget for 2022/23, it appeared that the immediate future looked more settled. An increase in funding through the Local Government Settlement of 8.8% for 2022/23 followed by indicative allocations of 3.5% for 2023/24 and 2.4% for 2024/25 meant that for the first time in a long time, the Council had an idea of the resources available to it for a three year period and could plan with a greater degree of certainty.

As a result of the 8.8% settlement, the Council was able to target investment at the recovery plans that were developed in 2021-22 and did not consider it necessary to increase council tax in 2022-23 to fund Council services. The Council was also able to allocate £2 million into a specific reserve to address the developing concerns at the time around cost of living.

However, within weeks of agreeing the 2022/23 budget, Russia invaded Ukraine and what has unfolded since has materially changed our operating environment.

Energy prices and energy security are having major impacts across Europe and more widely. We estimate energy costs for the Council to rise by 150% from April 2023 (circa. £8million if maintained for the entire

financial year). Inflation has already reached levels not seen since the 1980's which is feeding through in terms of 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 (NLW) by 10% and is set to increase the NLW by a similar degree in 2023-24. The Welsh Government has, additionally, committed to providing funding to enable at least the Real Living Wage to be paid to care workers across Wales.

The combined impact of the pandemic and Brexit has also had a mixed impact across our local economy. Ongoing supply chain disruptions are adding to cost pressures.

Income levels have been impacted by the pandemic too with many residents having made significant changes to their lifestyles during the pandemic period – this is particularly affecting theatres, car parks and leisure services where the number of paying customers is yet to return to pre-pandemic levels.

Furthermore, 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 the level of investor interest is very welcome, this is placing considerable pressure on Planning, Economic Development and other regulatory services.

To complete the general overview, good progress has been made in implementing various policy initiatives set out in the Programme for Government and the associated Plaid Cymru/Labour Co-operation Agreement in 2022-23. For example, the roll out of free school meals in primary schools; and the expansion of the free childcare offer. Good progress has also been made in progressing priorities established by the Rainbow Coalition including: the allocation of additional capital funds to improve the public realm; commencing a review of the decision to re-organise education in the Swansea Valley; the submission of four substantial bids to the Levelling Up and Shared Prosperity funds; supporting the progress of major inward investment interests at Afan

Valley and Dulais Valley; and submitting a collaborative bid for a Freeport.

Executive Summary

During the three week public consultation period 966 responses were received from members of the public. A summary of these responses is included at Appendix 8 of this report.

As a result of the consultation responses, the following changes to the Draft Budget are proposed for the Cabinet to consider:

Council Tax

In relation to council tax there is no change to the proposed increase of 4.5%. However, in light of the consultation responses a number of additional mitigating actions are proposed namely:

- A two-year expansion of two welfare benefits advisors in the Welfare Rights Service, helping more residents to maximise their income through benefits advice;
- Further streamlining of internal assessment arrangements – ultimately ensuring that residents are advised of their total entitlement to help and support through a ‘tell us once’ model of service;
- Improvements in the speed with which we pay micro businesses and SMEs (small and medium-sized enterprises);
- An expansion of the work being done with the support of Chwarae Teg to help employees on lower pay scales to progress to better paid work within the organisation; and
- Joint work on debt management and recovery with Public Services Board partners.

Use of reserves

In relation to the proposed use of £3.5m general reserves and £1.4m specific reserves to part fund indoor leisure there are no changes proposed.

Fees and charges

As a result of the feedback received through the consultation there was a clear message that a 10% across the board rise in fees and charges was too high. It is therefore proposed that fees and charges in selected categories will increase by 5% in 2023/24.

Additionally, and to note, pest control rodent fees are not proposed to be increased in 2023-24. Car parking income is proposed to increase by £200k and the options for achieving this will be brought forward as part of a separate report if Cabinet and Council approve the proposed income target. Some fees and charges are not controlled by the Council. Finally, the leisure services listed at Appendix have separate subsidy reduction targets applied.

The funding gap created by the proposed reduction in fees and charges is proposed to be met by using the £1m identified against a specific grant contingency budget in the draft budget.

It is further proposed that a fundamental review of all fees and charges be conducted in advance of the 2024-25 revenue budget to set a clear policy for the remainder of the medium term financial plan period.

Celtic Leisure

One in four of the respondents questioned the priority being given to bringing the service in-house at an additional annual cost of over £4 million. The target date for completing the transfer back to the Council's direct control is 31st March 2024. An updated business plan will be developed to inform future year budgets with an emphasis of reducing the level of subsidy required from Council Tax.

Additional support for schools and children - proposal for time limited investment in the development of enhanced models of support with a focus on pupil engagement

The engagement activities conducted pre-consultation identified a significant ongoing Covid impact on children across our schools.

It is proposed that a model be developed to provide an early intervention model of enhanced, co-ordinated support for some of our most vulnerable young people who have adversely affected by the Covid pandemic. The aim is to improve engagement in learning, attendance and reducing the number of young people excluded from education, while raising aspirations and strengthening links with families and communities. The support will target identified cohorts of young people within secondary schools.

The proposed model will be person centred and strengths based, primarily taking place in school and community settings. It will secure a multi-disciplinary approach through collaborative working between Schools, Education Services and Children and Young People's Service, with a focus on positive outcomes for our most vulnerable learners.

A more detailed proposition will be brought forward early in the new financial year including a proposal around funding.

Mid and West Wales Fire and Rescue Authority (MAWWFRA) Levy

The final levy from the MAWWFRA has increased from the 13% originally proposed to 16.43%, this is a further increase of £295k. This is due to the fact that shortly before Christmas the Chief Fire Officer was advised by the Welsh Government that a pension related grant would be transferred into the Revenue Support Grant.

Welsh Government officials have confirmed that the £295k will be included within the Council's final Revenue Support Grant so there is no impact on the tax payer as a result; this means that the net increase in cost remains at 13%.

Settlement assumptions

The proposals contained within this report are based on the Provisional Local Government Settlement, plus a known adjustment in relation to the transfer into the Final Settlement to reflect a further increase in the Mid and West Wales Fire and Rescue Authority levy. This transfer into the Final Settlement means that the net increase in the cost of the fire and rescue service to Neath Port Talbot tax payers remains at 13%. The Welsh Government have indicated that there will be no further significant variations between the provisional and final settlement.

This report therefore requests that authority is delegated to the Chief Finance Officer, in consultation with the Chief Executive, Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Performance and Social Justice to make any amendment necessary through the use of general reserves, as a consequence of the Final Settlement due 8th March 2023.

2023/24 Budget gap

The table on the following page shows the estimated amount of funding needed to run council services in 2023/24 and the funding available

The 2022/23 pay award added £12.5m to the Council's paybill which equated to an average increase of 6%. With only 4% included notionally within this year's Local Government Settlement, the pay award was unfunded to the value of c£4.3m.

During 2023-24, managers have been asked to maintain a tight financial discipline to mitigate any overspend arising from the unfunded pay award. The revenue budget monitoring report for the period ended 31st December 2022 suggests that the Council is likely to contain overall expenditure broadly within the available cash limit. Specific measures taken in year include:

- Robust management of all vacant posts;
- Additional income generation;
- Identifying expenditure that can be legitimately offset e.g. against grant and other funding; and
- Savings arising from hybrid working;.

In addition to the unfunded pay award from 2022/23, the Council is also predicting pay and inflationary costs of £26.920m for 2023/24. Taken collectively, the above items will increase the cost of running Council services by £31.220m. These cost increases represent the cost of providing existing Council services i.e. the increase in cost just to stand still.

There are also unavoidable service pressures which will increase the estimated cost of running council services by £10.984m as detailed in Appendix 3.

In addition, there are £10.879m of budget pressures identified which may materialise during 2023/24. These are set out in detail in Appendix 4. Every effort will be made to manage these risks but if they do materialise, they will need to be funded by Council reserves or in-year savings/additional income in the first instance. Any recurring unavoidable pressures will then be built into the base budget in subsequent financial years. These are collectively referred to as 'pressures to be monitored'. Also included within the proposals are a number of spend to earn

pressures where investments will in effect pay for themselves, these are shown in Appendix 5 of the report.

The Provisional Local Government Settlement received on 14th December 2022, details an increase in funding of £18.323m or 7.1%. This is greater than the indicative 3.5% previously outlined but is still wholly inadequate in relation to funding the increased costs the Council will incur in 2023-24.

The Settlement also includes details of some specific grants at an all Wales level. There are several grants which have been kept at 2022/23 levels which in real terms cut in funding due to the effect of pay awards and inflation. For these grants, activity will need to be adjusted to remain within the amount of funding available

2023/24 Budget gap summary

	£'000	£'000
2022/23 net budget		338,020
Unavoidable cost increases		
Unfunded pay award from 2022/23	4,300	
Inflation and pay awards (appendix 2)	26,905	
Unavoidable pressures (appendix 3)	10,984	
Total unavoidable cost increases	42,189	
Total estimated cost of Council services 2023/24		380,209
Funding available		
Council tax -2022/23 level		80,334
Welsh Government (WG) funding 2022/23 level		258,072
Increase in WG funding for 2023/24		18,323
Discretionary rate relief		-387
Total Funding Available		356,342
Budget Gap		23,867

The budget gap detailed above is greater than any single year gap faced through the recent period of austerity.

Included within the above are assumptions around fees and charges income and energy costs which are explained in more detail below:

Fees and charges

The draft budget proposals included an assumption that fees and charges would be reviewed in line with inflation and an assumed increase of 10% was included in the budget calculations.

The feedback received from respondents to the consultation was mixed with 31% of respondents agreeing that 10% was reasonable but a larger number felt that a 10% across the board rise in fees and charges was too high. It is therefore proposed that fees and charges in selected categories will increase by 5% in 2023/24. This 5% increase has been assumed for theatres; waste disposal contracts; trade refuse; bulky item collection; cemeteries and various fines.

Additionally, and to note, pest control rodent fees are not proposed to be increased in 2023-24. Car parking income is proposed to increase by £200k and the options for achieving this will be brought forward as part of a separate report if Cabinet and Council approve the proposed income target. Some fees and charges are not controlled by the Council and fees and charges will therefore vary as applicable. Finally, the leisure services listed at Appendix have separate subsidy reduction targets applied.

The funding gap created by the proposed reduction in fees and charges is proposed to be met by using the £1m identified against a specific grant contingency budget in the draft budget.

Energy

Energy costs are anticipated to rise by 150% from April 2023. It is not certain that this level of cost increase will apply for the duration of the financial year with wholesale gas prices currently reducing sharply from their 2022 high. Consequently an increase of 50% has been allowed for in departmental budgets in 2023/24.

A further 50% provision has been set aside in an energy contingency budget of £2.8m. This budget will be available to help fund works which make premises more energy efficient; help the Council with their ambition to

transition to more renewable energy; and will also act as a contingency budget in the short term. If these budget proposals are approved, detailed terms of reference will be developed setting out how this budget can be accessed, including by schools.

Immediate actions to reduce energy consumption and costs have already commenced with the proposed closure of satellite office buildings. Further phases of the strategic accommodation review will be reported throughout the next financial year. The Director of Education, Leisure and Lifelong is also working with headteachers to identify support that could be made available to reduce energy costs across the school estate. An early initiative is to explore the services of an organisation called 'Energy Sparks' who work with schools to help reduce their electricity and gas usage. Finally, street lighting is also a significant consumer of energy. The Head of Streetcare is currently engaging with the Institute of Lighting Professionals to develop a set of proposals to reduce energy consumption across the street lighting infrastructure.

Strategy for closing the budget gap

Since it became apparent that the financial outlook had deteriorated significantly Council officers have been working on proposals to close the budget gap. This work has been multi-faceted and has included early engagement with staff, trade unions, all members of Council, representatives of the school community and other interested stakeholders.

The starting point in relation to the 2023/24 budget strategy has been the work undertaken during the current financial year to drive down the projected overspend as already referenced on pages 3 and 4 of this report.

The budget strategy for 2023-24 is based on the following key objectives:

Maintaining a clear focus on recovery from Covid-19

There are exceptional pressures across the Council as the impact of policies pursued during the Covid-19 response period emerge. In particular, there are much higher volumes of demand/need presenting in social services, housing and education together with an increase in the complexity of need. It is not yet clear when the rise in demand/need will peak. As the Council has many statutory duties to fulfil in relation to the people impacted, it is crucial that we can remain focused on our recovery work to avoid more cases escalating to a point of crisis when much more expensive solutions would need to be found.

In Environment Directorate, there are some backlogs of work and pent up demand that needs attention as part of recovery. Where there are performance pressures, these are almost exclusively a result of the impact of actions taken during Covid-19 response where the Council was asked to re-purpose staff, facilities and other resources to support the governments' objectives to protect the NHS and to save lives. We need to maintain our focus on addressing the consequences of these policies throughout 2023-24.

Supporting our communities through the cost of living crisis

At the beginning of the 2022-23 financial year, we were already seeing signs of financial hardship across communities. The energy crisis and huge increase in inflation has seen many more residents and businesses experience financial hardship as the year has unfolded. The Council has played a significant role in making sure that financial support from government reaches those eligible for that support; and the Council has now mobilised a partnership with Warm Wales, unlocking the £2million set aside at budget setting time to assist those experiencing the greatest hardship but who are unable to seek help from other sources. Additional practical support is being provided through the re-purposing of over 30 council buildings to help people access a warm place and support; we are working with partners to promote all other forms of help and support available to those who need it; and putting an increased focus at community level to seek out those most vulnerable and to connect these to help and support near where they live. The NPT Safe and Well Partnership has been re-purposed to co-ordinate the Council's work with partners and with the wider community action taking place. The immediate outlook in 2023-24 is one of continuing hardship for residents and the Council will need to continue to play its part in supporting residents over this period.

Facilitating and Enabling Economic Growth

There has been a mixed impact across the local economy as the pandemic cost of living crisis have taken their course. The Council has been responsible for administering significant financial support to businesses on behalf of government and providing other practical support where possible.

We are also dealing with a growing portfolio of major economic development initiatives. These include: a £250 million proposed investment in an adventure resort in the Afan Valley; a £200 million proposed investment in a Global Centre for Rail Excellence in the Dulais Valley; a potential Freeport covering the port of Port Talbot and the Port of Milford Haven which would attract seed capital of £25 million and potentially £0.5 billion in retained

business rates for investment in hard and soft infrastructure over the programme life cycle; a £28 million investment programme over the remainder of this financial year and the next two financial years through the Shared Prosperity Fund; the ongoing delivery of the City Deal programme; together with the potential to draw down significant capital funds to support innovation and housing developments and the prospect of some success with our three Levelling Up Fund bids. The Council has performed well in supporting these initiatives thus far but will need to increase investment in its economic growth functions to secure the successful delivery of this portfolio and to maximise the benefits to local people and local supply chains.

Delivering local and Welsh Government policy priorities

We are in the second year of the current Senedd term and in the first year of the local government term. The Welsh Government has set out an extensive programme of policy commitments that will impact on councils. The Rainbow Coalition also has its own policy priorities which are being implemented and which will feature in an updated Corporate Plan that will be presented to Council in March 2023.

Ensuring a sustainable Council

There has been a material change to the Council's operating environment over this financial year. The much changed budget outlook, the workforce constraints and the pace of change combine to challenge the existing operating model.

The consultation responses showed widespread support for these key objectives.

Budget solutions

Over the medium term, the Council will need to pursue a robust strategy that will transform the way services and functions are delivered within a clearly defined framework of priorities, whilst also ensuring financial sustainability and good governance. The key elements of the financial strategy include the following which are detailed further in Appendix 6:

Economy and efficiency measures including budget re-basing - £811k

An exercise has been undertaken to systematically 're-base' budgets. This is to reflect the fact that the Council is now working in a very different way post-pandemic and therefore budgets are no longer necessarily aligned to where activity is now being delivered.

A review of all expenditure headings is also underway to identify where more efficient ways of working can deliver a reduction in cost.

Accommodation - £158k

This workstream is part of a strategy to reduce the fixed costs of the organisation. The first phase of the strategy is to reduce the number of smaller satellite office buildings occupied by the Council. The second phase of the review will be to look at the wider buildings portfolio, including use of the three civic centres given that most of the Council's office-based staff are now working in a hybrid manner.

Grant maximisation - £611k

The Council receives circa £55m of specific grant funding. Officers are examining the extent to which grant funding is being optimised to reflect the Council's priorities and the opportunity to fully recover the costs of resourcing the related activities. The Council needs to maximise the opportunities to second core funded staff to work on specific grant funded programmes to avoid increasing its headcount at a time of such significant financial challenges, supported by clear exit strategies that do not place the security of employment of any seconded staff at risk.

Subsidy removal - £574k

The Council operate a number of discretionary services which currently run on a subsidised basis. It is very unlikely that there will be sufficient funding to resource these services on the current basis in future years and consequently different funding models will need to evolve if we are to sustain these services over the medium and longer term.

This is likely to involve a significant increase in commercialisation to remove the core funding subsidy on a phased basis, recognising that this cannot be achieved within one year. There will be opportunities for capital investment to help deliver reduced cost or generate additional income.

Further to feedback received at the various scrutiny committees the following paragraphs provide some detail in relation to how the savings targets for 2023/24 will be achieved.

Gnoll Country Park

We have recently been successful in securing a Levelling Up Fund (LUF) bid from the UK Government. The fund will invest £17,755,359 in the Vale of Neath Heritage Corridor Visitor Attractor and focuses on two transformational projects one of which is aimed at improving the historic estate, its visitor offer and establishing overnight accommodation.

A masterplan has been developed to deliver this aim which identifies investments in the heritage of the park, diversifying the play offer, modernising the café and visitor centre, enhancing biodiversity, interpretation opportunities and improving connectivity within the park and also to the adjoining Woodland Trust site. This investment will ensure that the park remains an attractive destination to local residents but also attracts both day and overnight visitors from further afield.

Afan Forest Park

A new food and beverage operator has recently taken over the café within the park, and their business plan identifies a scaling up of their offer to attract more business. This improved offer together with the recent council investment within the carpark, which now includes electric charging facilities together with other improvements to the children's playground and camp site will increase both day and overnight visitors, which over time will ensure that the park is not reliant upon council subsidy.

Margam Park

We will continue to maximise our income generation capability by promoting value for money attractions in a safe and welcoming environment. Giving the customer what they want whilst continually refreshing the offer. We will promote the Orangery as one of Wales' premier wedding venues whilst reviewing our pricing structure on the back of the recent investments into the facility. New income generating opportunities will be explored as and when appropriate.

Skills and Training

Improved trading performance anticipated resulting from having a single Chief Officer overseeing the operations within the Council helping to maximise efficiencies and driving out duplication of costs.

School Cleaning

Increased recharge to schools based on agreed formula to reduce the Council subsidy to zero. The risk is some schools may choose to buy their cleaning service from external provider.

Leisure services

Post Covid it is anticipated to return to an improved trading position through growing the membership on the back of recent investments such as the new Neath Leisure Centre, thereby increasing income.

Retaining the current membership and reducing costs through investment in energy saving strategies

Service remodelling - £150k

Changes to working practices within the digital services division will deliver this saving.

Other savings - £13,048k

The vast majority of solutions are included under the category of 'other savings'. Further details can be found in Appendix 6. The single largest item relates to the revaluation of the Local Government Scheme Pension Fund (LGPS) which has resulted in a saving of £5m next year.

Other savings relate to; but not limited to; the reduced employers national insurance contribution rate payable next year; increased investment interest; improved council tax collections assumptions and a reduction in the number of council tax support scheme claimants.

Reserves position

As part of the budget strategy for 2023/24, it is proposed to use £3.5m of the Council's general reserve balance to underpin the budget. The rationale for this is articulated through the objectives set out above. We expect the growth in demand for services to reach a peak in 2023/24, all other things being equal. 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.

The Council agreed a general reserves policy which states that the general reserve balance should be kept at c4% of the net revenue budget. The 2022/23 net revenue budget is currently £338m meaning that the general reserve should be held at c£13.5m. The above proposal would see the general reserve balance held at £16.5m which exceeds the 4% target but provides much needed financial resilience for balancing the budget over the medium term.

In addition, it is proposed to utilise £1.4m from specific reserves to help meet the cost of running indoor leisure services whilst the further options referred to above are developed.

It is also proposed that a proposal be brought forward to deliver a targeted programme to support children in schools impacted by the Covid pandemic. This programme will provide an early intervention model of enhanced, co-ordinated support for some of our most vulnerable young people who have adversely affected by the Covid pandemic.

The aim is to improve engagement in learning, attendance and reducing the number of young people excluded from education, while raising aspirations and strengthening links with families and communities. The support will target identified cohorts of young people within secondary schools.

The proposed model will be person centred and strengths based, primarily taking place in school and community settings. It will secure a multi-disciplinary approach through collaborative working between Schools, Education Services and Children and Young People's Service, with a focus on positive outcomes for our most vulnerable learners.

Proposals for council tax in 2023/24

Under the Local Government Finance Act 1992 Council are required to set a balanced budget with regard to the advice of the Chief Finance Officer (Section 151). A budget can be legitimately balanced through the use of reserves however Council must be mindful that once spent reserves are no longer available to balance future years' budgets.

In setting out 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 set out above fully realised and after the use of reserves there still remains a budget gap for 2023/24.

This includes an increase equivalent to the value of 1.8% council tax to cover the net uplift in cost of the Mid and West Wales Fire and Rescue Authority levy over which the Council has no control; an increase equivalent to the value of 2% council tax required to begin to address the budget gap required to keep indoor leisure facilities open in 2023/24. There is also a requirement to increase council tax as the cost of providing placements for children with additional learning needs increases.

In order to fund the above it is proposed that the council tax needed to run Council services will increase by 4.5% next year with an increase at Band D from £1,660.02 to £1,734.72

Details of the proposed council tax by band and the number of properties in each band is shown below:

	Current £	Proposed including 4.5% increase £	Annual Increase £	Monthly Increase £	Cumulative Dwellings	Dwellings %	Cumulative Dwellings %
Band A	1,106.68	1,156.48	49.80	4.15	13,315	20.61%	20.61%
Band B	1,291.13	1,349.23	58.10	4.84	39,718	40.86%	61.46%
Band C	1,475.57	1,541.97	66.40	5.53	51,095	17.61%	79.07%
Band D	1,660.02	1,734.72	74.70	6.23	58,229	11.04%	90.11%
Band E	2,028.91	2,120.21	91.30	7.61	62,630	6.81%	96.92%
Band F	2,397.81	2,505.71	107.90	8.99	63,987	2.10%	99.02%
Band G	2,766.70	2,891.20	124.50	10.38	64,512	0.81%	99.83%
Band H	3,320.04	3,469.44	149.40	12.45	64,604	0.14%	99.98%
Band I	3,873.38	4,047.68	174.30	14.53	64,619	0.02%	100.00%

2023/24 Budget overview

The following table summarises the proposed 2023/24 budget with additional information provided in Appendix 1:

	£'000
2022/23 Original budget	338,020
Unavoidable cost increases	
Unfunded pay award from 2022/23	4,300
Inflation and pay awards (appendix 2)	26,905
Unavoidable pressures (appendix 3)	10,984
Total unavoidable cost increases	42,189
Budget solutions (excluding increased council tax collection rate included in funding below)	-14,352
Other adjustments	15
Contribution from specific reserve re: leisure	-1,400
Contribution from general reserves	-3,500
Total budget	360,972
Funded by	

Aggregate external finance	276,691
Discretionary rate relief	-387
Council tax including a 4.5% increase and an increase in collection rate to 98%	84,668
Total funding	360,972

Medium term financial outlook

The medium term financial outlook over the next five years is challenging. With inflation currently running at 10.1% (CPI January 2023) and the national living wage rising by 9.7% in 2023/24 there looks to be no let up in the cost increases facing the Council

The current medium term financial plan (MTFP) to 2027/28 includes pay and inflationary pressures over the five year period amounting to £85m; unavoidable service pressures of £17m and local growth pressures arising from changing demographics of £16m.

After taking account of assumed Welsh Government funding of £47m over the period 2023-2028 **there still remains a funding gap of £48m** which represents 20% of the Council's overall net revenue budget (excluding schools).

Work is ongoing in relation to developing a number of strategies to close this gap. During the pre-consultation engagement and from the recent public consultation exercise we received many suggestions as to where the Council could reduce expenditure or increase income. These have shaped the strategies we are putting in place as follows:

Accommodation

- A phased review is now underway

Energy

- Initial urgent focus on reducing consumption
- Short term focus on energy efficiency
- Medium-long term focus on our aim to transition to renewables

Transport and Fleet

- Short term options for better utilisation – will include potential policy changes
- Medium-long term options for reducing and transitioning the current fleet to renewables

Commissioning and Procurement

- Series of reviews to examine all external spend – efficiency and economy savings; market mix and value for money
- **Budget re-basing**
- Complete work commenced in 2022-23
- **Statutory Services - Service Re-modelling**
- In-depth consideration of service models to meet forecast need within anticipated funding limits
- **Discretionary Services – remodelling**
- Alternative sources of income and efficiency measures
- **Automation and process improvement**
- Deliver agreed pipeline of reviews – will also underpin other reviews
- **Empty Homes – Council Tax**
- Review of Council Tax levels for empty homes – consultation early 2023-24
- **Fees and Charges**
- Root and branch review of policy to inform the setting of fees and charges into future years
- value for money

There are also a number of suggestions made that are still under consideration and these are itemised in the consultation report at Appendix 8.

Service overview and investment

Education, Leisure and Lifelong Learning including Schools

The budget proposals include a like for like increase in the delegated schools budget of £7.64m or 8% which is greater than the Council's settlement from the Welsh Government of 7.1%.

This budget also supports the Council's ambition to increase the number of Welsh speakers through funding the opening of a new Welsh medium starter school. The new school is one of 3 which are planned through the life of our Welsh Education Strategic Plan, (WESP) over the next 10 years. Improving access to Welsh medium education is a key strategic goal of the Council in delivering against our targets identified within the WESP.

The Education, Leisure and Lifelong learning budget is proposed to increase by £3.6m or 13%.

Following the decision of Members to bring indoor leisure services back in house, the budget delivers against the Council's ambition to support the health and wellbeing of its citizens and its staff. The new Neath Leisure

Centre opened at the end of January 2023 and provides a state of the art facility for its members and the wider public.

Additional funding is proposed to support some of our most vulnerable learners to deliver specialist places in purpose built facilities to improve the education and wellbeing outcomes for young people. There is significant additional demand for these specialist places which has grown since Covid.

Social Services, Health and Housing

The Social Services, Health and Housing budget is set to increase by £13.8m. This represents an increase of 15% in the social services budget which compares with the 7.1% provided by Welsh Government in the Provisional Settlement.

In 2023-24 the Social Services Health and Housing Directorate will continue to provide services to the most vulnerable children, young people, adults and older people in Neath Port Talbot. Alongside meeting legal duties to safeguard and protect children and adults at risk, the Directorate provides statutory support for residents (and their carers) in the County Borough with a disability and/or mental health issues including mental illness and dementia.

In relation to Children and Young People Services, the Directorate will continue to support the 266 children currently in its care and more than 1,000 children that have been assessed as needing services.

The Housing Options Team ensures that the Council meets its legal requirements to accommodate the homeless and in the 2022 calendar year dealt with 2,745 requests for support. Similar numbers are expected in 2023/24. The wider Housing Support Service will be ensuring that there are robust strategies in place regarding Rapid Rehousing and tackling the wider general Housing need across Neath Port Talbot.

Adult Services, amongst many other duties, will continue to support older people who are frail and unable to care for themselves. Currently 545 people are being provided with Residential Care and 680 are receiving the Domiciliary care that allows them to stay in their own homes with the care that they need.

Environment Directorate

The budget proposals would see a like for like increase in the Environment Directorate budget of £3.9m or 9%.

This directorate delivers a diverse range of services ranging from the more visible services including the, maintenance of our highways, drainage and street lighting infrastructure, the collection of waste and the management of our parks and green/open spaces to the less visible services including the planning, economic development, and regeneration teams.

The council has recently invested in the enhancement of a number of these services so that we are more able to respond to the increasingly challenging demands we are faced with. Unfortunately climate change is resulting in more frequent heavy bursts of rain which is in turn increasing the number of localised flooding incidents. Investment in our drainage team is enabling us to apply for more grant funding when available, which will in turn enable us to increase the capacity of our drainage network and reduce such incidents in the future.

Despite the current economic climate and cost of living crisis, we are seeing signs of increasing economic interest in Neath Port Talbot with many businesses and investors seeking to explore and deliver further opportunities. In order to assist these ambitions we have invested in boosting the strength of our planning and economic development teams which will ensure that we can guide them through the complicated regulatory frameworks but also support them with advice and financial assistance when necessary. This partnership working will enable us to deliver well paid jobs for our growing green economy.

Ongoing impact of Covid

During the pandemic a large number of staff were redeployed to respond to the impacts of the virus. This included staff who designed and supervised the construction of field hospitals, testing centres and vaccination centre. Large numbers of staff were also redeployed to deliver the Test Trace and Protect (TTP) service with additional specialist input from qualified environmental health officers. As a consequence of this activity, backlogs of business as usual activity were generated and whilst staff have made significant inroads in dealing with these backlogs, these still remain in some sections of the Directorate. It should also be noted that a pared down version of the TTP service continues to operate primarily covering care homes, special schools and significant outbreaks. The team consists of a mix of internal staff who continue to be redeployed to this team from the

wider directorate in addition to externally recruited staff. The temporary loss of redeployed staff continues to place pressure on services.

In addition to the above, the advice and support required by residents and businesses has increased. The impact upon our town centres and public transport providers is significant due to a decrease in footfall/patronage. The council is therefore supporting these areas to ensure that they can recover from the effects of the pandemic and return to being financially sustainable going forward.

Corporate Services

The Corporate Services budget is set to increase next year by £1.4m or 7%.

The Corporate Services Directorate will continue to provide the support services which underpin the delivery of the Council's frontline services, support the Council's democratic processes and ensure the Council has robust governance arrangements in place.

The Directorate will deliver the Enabling Programme, set out in the Corporate Plan, a programme of organisational development which will develop the capacity and capability of the council over a 3-5 year period, across people, digital, assets, financial stability, governance and engagement.

The budget proposals include additional investment in digital services to ensure that the Council is adequately resourced with the skills and knowledge needed to support a number of major service transformation programmes which will take place over the forthcoming years.

Through our new Digital Services Target Operating Model, we have developed a roadmap to transform our delivery of digital, data and technology services to residents, businesses, and visitors. It's not about more tech, more platforms, more solutions to problems we think exist, it's about real user centred design, placing our residents, businesses and visitors at the heart of our service delivery.

We will join up and use the data we hold to improve our understanding of what matters to our service users, and explore how technology such as Robotics and Automation can transform labour intensive processes.

Crime and Disorder Impact

The Council has a legal duty under Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 to carry out all its various functions with “due regard to the need to prevent Crime and Disorder in its area”.

There are no specific proposals which will impact on crime and disorder. The proposal to provide targeted interventions to support children impacted on by the pandemic should have a beneficial impact in this area.

Integrated Impact Assessment

The Equality Act 2010 requires public bodies to “pay due regard to the need to:

- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Act;
- advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it; and
- foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristics and persons who do not share it.”

Section 1 of the Equality Act requires that public bodies when making strategic decisions, have due regard to the need to reduce the inequalities of outcome resulting from socio-economic disadvantage.

This budget prioritises the ongoing recovery from the pandemic and the need to support communities through the cost of living crisis. The investments delivered by this budget proposal will help to reduce inequalities, in particular supporting those in lower socio-economic groupings and those who have a disability, are elderly and frail or who are young and in need of support. An integrated impact assessment (IIA) is appended to this report and this provides further detail.

Workforce Impacts

This budget supports the Council’s commitment to social partnership and to maintaining security of employment to the maximum extent possible. The Cabinet members have worked closely with the trade unions throughout the budget process, lobbying both UK and Welsh Governments to prioritise local government within their spending decisions and also encouraging staff to

contribute ideas from an early point in the budget process so that everyone has an opportunity to shape the budget proposals.

Legal Impacts

The provisions of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 (LGFA 1992) set out what the council has to base its budget calculations upon, and require the council to set a balance budget with regard to the advice of its Chief Finance Officer (section 151). The council has a legal duty to provide a range of statutory services and these duties are not absolved if the budget is set late or not agreed

The setting of the budget is a function reserved to full Council, who will consider the draft budget which has been prepared by the Executive.

Once the budget has been agreed by full Council the Executive cannot make any decisions which conflict with it, although virements and year-in-year changes can be made in accordance with the Financial Procedure Rules.

Section 30(6) LGFA 1992 provides that the council has got to set its budget before 11 March in the financial year preceding the one in respect of which the budget is set.

A failure to set or a delay in setting the budget may well affect the council's ability to enter into any new agreements unless the budget is agreed as otherwise these would be potentially unlawful as unfunded commitments. Councils also have increasingly important financial and corporate governance reputations to keep strong and the failure to set a council tax, or even informal references to a potential failure to set a council tax, would be likely to have a significant adverse impact on the council's reputation locally and nationally in terms of investor confidence. The council as a corporate body and the members, both individually and collectively, have a fiduciary duty to council taxpayers to avoid things that would result in loss of revenue or failure to deliver services along with moral and democratic obligations that this brings.

Consultation

Early engagement activities were undertaken prior to Christmas 2022 with staff and with residents. The engagement exercise generated a

large number of ideas which have been carefully considered in drawing up the draft budget proposals. The Cabinet authorised a period of public consultation on 19th January. Additional engagement and consultation activities have been undertaken on the draft Budget for 2023-24. The consultation started on 19 January and closed on 10 February 2023.

Activities included:

- Online questionnaire - a self-completion questionnaire was published online. Respondents were not asked to identify themselves, but were asked to indicate why they were interested in the council's budget setting process and their postcode. The questionnaire was live from Thursday 19 January (following Cabinet's approval) until midnight on Friday 10 February 2023.
- Email – the email address LetsTalk@npt.gov.uk was promoted for people who wanted to respond via this mechanism.
- Offline – paper questionnaires, explainer leaflets, reference copies of the cabinet report dated 19 January 2023 and feedback boxes for completed questionnaires were made available in public buildings across the county borough. These included Civic Centres, council run and community libraries, and Celtic Leisure venues amongst others. The questionnaire was a replica of the online version and responses were entered into the survey software for analysis.
- NPT Council employee meetings – consultation meetings took place for council employees (9 meetings at council buildings, including 1 hybrid meeting, plus 1 MS Teams meeting). These were led by a panel including chief officers and trade union representatives and provided a briefing on the draft budget and an opportunity for employees to ask questions and put forward additional comments and suggestions.
- Stakeholder consultation – this included all scrutiny committees, Staff Council, Youth Council, Voluntary Sector Liaison Forum, Town and Community Councils Liaison Forum, and a meeting with representatives from the Voluntary Sector.
- An online public meeting was also held.

The consultation was promoted via:

- the council's website:
 - on the homepage – via the 'top tasks' and 'home page tile
 - a dedicated web page www.npt.gov.uk/LetsTalk
 - on the consultation pages www.npt.gov.uk/consultations

- adverts/posters on TV screens in Neath and Port Talbot Bus Stations and Neath Train Station
- posters and an explainer leaflet at libraries, Celtic Leisure venues, civic centres and other public buildings across the county borough
- the council's corporate social media accounts
- an explainer video published on the council's website and social media channels
- press coverage generated by cabinet reports and press releases via the NPT Community of Practice on Involvement and Engagement

Section 151 Officer Responsibility and Risk Management

Section 25 of the Local Government Act 2003 requires the Chief Financial Officer to report to Council on the “robustness of the estimates” used in calculating the budget requirement.

The Chief Finance Officer has made the necessary enquiries and received assurances from officers that the estimates are prudent and achievable.

A pay contingency equivalent to 2% has been set aside in the base budget to fund any variations and the risks in delivering the savings included in the budget. Should the risks be higher than this then the General Reserve and Corporate Contingency Reserve will be available to support any emergency calls.

There are a number of substantial risks contained within these proposals which will need to be monitored and managed during 2023/24. The following is not an exhaustive list but represents the most significant at this stage:

- Energy costs – there is a risk that by only funding energy inflation at 50% and relying on an energy review which has not commenced yet that we do not contain energy costs within budget. In order to mitigate against this risk £2.8m has been set aside in the base budget.
- Vacancy factor – if there are insufficient vacancy savings achieved in year and Corporate Directors are not able to identify other savings to make up any shortfall then there is a risk of an in-year overspend
- Removal of subsidies – the removal of subsidies over the course of the MTFP period represents a risk that if not achieved there will be a budget pressure or services would have to be reduced

- Pay award could be greater than the 6% included in the budget – especially in the context of ongoing industrial action across a number of sectors. This would create an in-year pressure that would have to be addressed through short term income and expenditure measures and would increase the budget gap over the medium term.
- There is a risk that the proposed increase in fees and charges will not be achieved if paying customers are below the level anticipated. This has been mitigated by reducing the planned 10% increase to 5%.
- The pressures to be monitored may become actual pressures which will require in year corrective action and increase the current £48m MTFP gap
- Demand for services does not decrease or even may increase, if this is the case permanent funding will need to be found for the £3.5m general reserve funding
- The ongoing war in Ukraine may have further impacts on the Council's financial position which would increase the gap over the medium term
- The impact of Brexit remains a risk, potentially affecting costs and the availability of labour. If these are significant they could increase the gap over the medium term and also cause short term cost pressures, particularly in the capital programme, leading to a re-prioritisation of capital schemes or a longer delivery timetable
- The predicted decline in inflation may not occur placing further pressure on Council budgets over the medium term
- Recruitment and retention of staff – without sufficient people being able to recruit into vacant posts, there is a risk that more work will be externalised adding to costs. This will be mitigated through the Future of Work strategy
- Legislative changes – there is a risk that new legislation is not fully funded placing additional pressure on council resources. This would increase the gap over the medium term
- In-year changes to specific grant funding – if grants are reduced in real terms an in-year adjustment service levels would need to be made to enable activities to be delivered within a lower cost base.
- Ability to deliver WG recycling targets to minimise financial penalties - the waste management review is underway and will produce a strategy that seeks to mitigate this risk.
- Inclement weather impacts on services, infrastructure, communities and budget/reserves – the Council retains good financial resilience as part of this budget strategy which would mitigate this risk.

The tables included in Appendix 6 of this report provide additional information regarding the risk/impact of each savings proposal.

Recommendation

Following commendation¹ at the Cabinet meeting of 1st March 2023, it is recommended that Council having due regard to the integrated impact assessment information set out in Appendix 9 consider the following recommendations.

Recommendation 1 - In relation to the proposed revenue budget for 2023-24 approve the budget proposals set out in appendix 1 of the report.

Recommendation 2 - In relation to fees and charges and in line with the principles outlined in this report the Council are asked to approve:

➤ 2a) Fees and Charges Executive Functions

That the following matters are delegated to the appropriate Corporate Director following consultation with the Council Leader, relevant Cabinet Member and Chair of the relevant Scrutiny committee:-

-Fees and charges applicable for the financial year 2023/24

-Fees and Charges which are applicable in any subsequent financial year and which, in the opinion of the relevant Corporate Director, need to be set in advance of the financial year for operational reasons.

➤ 2b) Fees and Charges Non Executive Function

Fees and charges for non-executive functions – that the determination of the following matters be delegated to the appropriate Corporate Director following consultation with the Council Leader, Deputy Leader and Chair of the relevant Non-executive committee

- Fees & charges applicable in 2023/24

¹ Subject to Cabinet agreeing the same at its meeting of the 1st March 2023. In the event of any changes this will be highlighted to Members' in advance of this meeting.

-Fees and charges applicable in any subsequent financial year and which, in the opinion of the Corporate Director, need to be set in advance of that financial year for operational reasons

Recommendation 3 - In relation to any variation between the Welsh Government final settlement and provisional settlement Council are asked to approve:

- That authority is delegated to the Chief Finance Officer, in consultation with the Chief Executive, Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Performance and Social Justice to make any amendment necessary through the use of general reserves, as a consequence of the final settlement.

Recommendation 4 - In relation to the setting of Council Tax levels for 2023/24 Council are asked to approve that:

- Council Tax in 2023/24 will increase by 4.5%. The 2023/24 Band D equivalent for Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council will be £1,734.72

Reason for Proposed Decision

To fulfil the statutory requirement to determine the budget for 2022/23.

To provide a mechanism for dealing with any variation between the provisional and final Welsh Government settlements

To agree arrangements for setting Fees and Charges.

Implementation of Decision

The decision is proposed for implementation after consideration and approval by Council.

Appendices

Appendix 1 - Revenue Budget 2023/24

Appendix 2 - Inflation assumptions

Appendix 3 - Unavoidable service pressures

Appendix 4 - Pressures to be monitored

Appendix 5 - Spend to earn initiatives
Appendix 6 - Budget solutions workstreams
Appendix 7 - Schedule of reserves
Appendix 8 - Summary of consultation responses
Appendix 9 - Integrated Impact Assessment

Background Papers

Budget Report – Cabinet, January 2023
Annexe containing all narrative comments received in the pre-consultation and consultation phases together with officer comments

Officer Contact

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Appendix 1 – 2023/24 Revenue Budget

Revenue Budget 2023/24						
	2022/23 Original Budget	NI / Pension reduction	2022/23 re- stated	2023/24 Original Budget	Additional investment	Additional investment
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	%
Directly controlled expenditure						
Schools	96,074	-1,626	94,447	102,086	7,638	8%
Education, leisure and lifelong learning	28,924	-834	28,090	31,677	3,587	13%
Social Services and Health	93,445	-1,764	91,681	105,572	13,891	15%
Environment	43,649	-1,369	42,280	46,262	3,982	9%
Corporate Services	20,820	-879	19,941	21,357	1,416	7%
	282,912	-6,473	276,439	306,953	30,515	
Levies and contributions						
Swansea Port Health Authority	46		46	46		
Fire Authority	8,503		8,503	9,923		
Margam Crematorium	1		1	1		
Corporate Joint Committee	117			127		
Archive Service	96		96	96		
Magistrates Court	10		10	10		
	8,773	0	8,656	10,203		
Other Expenditure						
Capital Financing	20,514		20,514	19,608		
Council Tax Support	19,621		19,621	19,413		
MTFP Equalisation	2,200		2,200	0		
Pay contingency	1,000		1,000	4,714		
Covid hardship fund cessation	2,500		2,500	0		
Contingency	500		500	781		
Energy Efficiency / transition / contingency	0		0	2,800		
	46,335	0	46,335	47,316		
Contribution from general reserve	0		0	-3,500		
Total budget	338,020	-6,473	331,430	360,972		

Appendix 2 – Pay and inflation

Expenditure Category	Inflation assumption	Value
	%	£
<u>Selected headings</u>		
Pay 4% plus 2% contingency		13,860
Energy - gas and electricity	50.00%	2,781
Other premises	2.00%	160
Home to school transport	9.00%	689
Other transport	3.00%	101
Materials	10.00%	911
External waste contracts	5.00%	326
Childrens services	10.00%	1,150
Adult services	12.28%	7,492
Other payments to thrid parties	2.00%	320
Fire Service Levy	13% (net)	1,105
Council Tax Reduction Scheme (linked to Ctax)	4.50%	883
Capital Financing	2.00%	410
Grant Income	3.00%	-1,665
Sales, fees and chagres	See report	-818
Rent	2.00%	-80
Contributions towards service costs	1.00%	-150
Other income	2.00%	-320
Total Pay & Inflation		26,905

Appendix 3 – Unavoidable Pressures

Directorate	Service Area	Detail	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
			2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28
Schools		Welsh Medium Starter School Neath Abbey	300	300	350		
Education, Leisure & Lifelong Learning	Leisure	Increased cost of operating indoor leisure	2,870	1,400			
Education, Leisure & Lifelong Learning	Home to school transport	Increase in contract price due to number of factors including cost of fuel, shortage of drivers	1,276				
Education, Leisure & Lifelong Learning	Additional learning needs	Increase in planned places for children with additional learning needs	350	250			
Environment		Core fund posts funded from service resilience reserve		500	500		
Environment	Civic Buildings	Quays and BBIC increase cost of electricity due to change in supplier	188				
Environment	Transport	Increased cost of current bus subsidies on valley routes	368				
Chief Executives	Digital Services	Increase in digital services budget to agreed target operating model (agreed during 21/22)	100				
Social Services, Health and Housing	Adult Services	Actual growth in placements	1,532	1,500			
Social Services, Health and Housing	Childrens services	Actual growth in residential care placements	1,200				
All services including schools		Energy contingency / efficiency / renewables	2,800				
Total funded unavoidable service pressures			10,984	3,950	850	0	0

Appendix 4 – Pressures to be monitored

Directorate	Service Area	Pressure	To be monitored		Risk if not supported	Additional comment
			High Risk £'000	Med / Low Risk £'000		
Social Services And Housing	Adult Services	Market Pay supplement for Social workers	£ 1,100		Social workers leaving NPT to work for other LA's who are currently paying more-meaning more work for those remaining, less time to do more detailed assessments of clients and clients potentially being placed into high cost placements as a first resort	
Social Services And Housing	Adult Services	2022/23 base budget funded from reserves - anticipation that late notification of grants will offset		£ 1,827	Reserves will run out leaving base budget gap	
Social Services And Housing	Adult Services	Homelessness	£ 600		Failure of statutory duty, people will be forced to live back on the streets	
Social Services And Housing	Childrens services	Residential Care increase in placements	£ 900		Failure of statutory duty	Actual growth of 7 places funded - potential 4 others to monitor
Social Services And Housing	Childrens services	Permanent funding of 23 temporary staff	£ 420		Increased workload for remaining social workers, potentially staff leave to work in other LA's, ill health of existing staff	
Chief Executives	Legal Services	Cost of additional Welsh language translation of Council minutes and attendance by the Translator at Council meetings. I		£ 10	Non compliance with Welsh language standards	
Chief Executives	Legal Services	Social Services Directorate indicated to the Safeguarding Team that they wished that they wished an experienced lawyer dedicated primarily to adult legal work, following the intended retirement of the current service Manager at some point in 2023/2024.		£ 30	Expertise required	

Appendix 4 – Pressures to be monitored

			To be monitored			
			High Risk	Med / Low Risk	Risk if not supported	Additional comment
Education, Leisure & Lifelong Learning	Schools delegated budget	Correct funding for teaching assistant hours		£ 4,500	Pressure on schools budget	
Education, Leisure & Lifelong Learning	Vulnerable learners	Cease of home office grant-funding needed to support reugee and asylum children		£ 180	Should be funded from central government	
Education, Leisure & Lifelong Learning	Cynnydd	End of grant		£ 600	Seeking alternative grant funding	
Environment	Waste	Increase to contract price over rate of inflation	£ 140		Potential in year pressure	
Environment	Waste	Fuel increase over rate of inflation	£ 200		Will not be able to operate the fleet to current level-service delivery may have to change	Part of waste strategy
Environment	Assets	National underground asset register		£ 180	Not a legal requirement	Paper copies of all utilities below ground in LA, need to digitise them in order with national policy changes-non compliance
Environment	Environmental Health and Trading standards	Increase budget to reflect true costs of barrister/QC costs		£ 75	Possible reputational damage	
Environment	Environmental Health and Trading standards	Reduction to crime act income budget-unachievable		£ 43	Overspend on budget in year	
Environment	Travel	Increase hours and grade of vacant bus support officer-currently 3 days and grade 3, upgrade to grade 5 and full time		£ 24	More admin onto officers and prevents them from carrying out their statutory duties	
Environment	Retaining walls	Additional funding for retaining wall inspections	£ 50		Retaining wall deficiencies not identified	
TOTAL			£ 3,410	£ 7,469		
35			TOTAL	£ 10,879		

Appendix 5 – Spend to earn initiatives

Directorate	Service Area	Pressure	Spend to Save / earn
			£'000
Environment	Waste	Improve recycling performance	£ 350
Environment	Engineering	Design posts to access grant funding	£ 62
Environment	Travel	Two active travel posts-grade 9 and grade 8	£ 112
TOTAL			£ 604

Appendix 6 – Budget solutions

Budget solution work streams 2023/24 to 2027/28								
Workstream	Ref	Estimated Saving	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	
Efficiency/Economy	E&E	£ 1,010,888	£ 810,888	£ 200,000	£ -	£ -	£ -	
Accommodation	ACC	£ 575,702	£ 158,000	£ 95,702	£ 322,000	£ -	£ -	
Grants	GR	£ 961,190	£ 611,190	£ 350,000	£ -	£ -	£ -	
Subsidy removal	SUB	£ 2,308,316	£ 574,157	£ 923,391	£ 625,261	£ 185,507	£ -	
Service remodelling	SERV	£ 162,188	£ 150,000	£ 12,188	£ -	£ -	£ -	
Other	OTHER	£ 13,898,000	£ 13,048,000	£ 250,000	£ 250,000	£ 350,000	£ -	
		£ 18,916,284	£ 15,352,235	£ 1,831,281	£ 1,197,261	£ 535,507	£ -	

Appendix 6 – Budget solutions

Budget solution work streams 2023/24 to 2027/28											
Workstream	Ref	Budget	Saving	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	Risk/Impact	Lead officer	Relevant Cabinet Board
Efficiency/Economy measures identified											
Car Allowances	E&E1	£ 1,028,960	£ 400,000	£ 400,000					Low risk. Based on post covid working practices	C Owen	Cabinet
CRB Checks	E&E2	£ 78,000	£ 10,000	£ 10,000					Low risk. Based on post covid working practices	C Owen	Cabinet
Eye tests	E&E3	£ 11,348	£ 7,000	£ 7,000					Low risk. Based on post covid working practices	C Owen	Cabinet
Water	E&E4	£ 272,049	£ 52,000	£ 52,000					Low risk. Based on post covid working practices	C Owen	Cabinet
General office expenses, books and subscriptions	E&E5	£ 300,000	£ 125,000	£ 125,000					Low risk. Based on post covid working practices	C Owen	Cabinet
Pat testing	E&E6	£ 31,000	£ 10,000	£ 10,000					Low risk. Based on post covid working practices	C Owen	Cabinet
Periodicals, municipal journals etc.	E&E7	£ 3,535	£ 2,500	£ 2,500					Low risk. Based on post covid working practices	C Owen	Cabinet
Window cleaning	E&E8	£ 21,000	£ 10,000	£ 10,000					Low risk. Based on post covid working practices	C Owen	Cabinet
Canvassing	E&E9	£ 49,206	£ 10,000	£ 10,000					Low risk. Based on post covid working practices	C Owen	Cabinet
Stationery	E&E10	£ 85,135	£ 75,000	£ 75,000					Low risk. Based on post covid working practices	C Owen	Cabinet
Conference fees - overnight travel etc.	E&E11	£ 12,000	£ 5,000	£ 5,000					Low risk. Based on post covid working practices	C Owen	Cabinet
Furniture purchasing	E&E12	£ 10,500	£ 10,500	£ 10,500					Low risk. Based on post covid working practices	C Owen	Cabinet
Postages	E&E13	£ 167,000	£ 3,000	£ 3,000					Low risk. Based on post covid working practices	C Owen	Cabinet
Medical Fees	E&E14	£ 155,000	£ 40,000	£ 40,000					Low risk. Based on post covid working practices	C Owen	Cabinet
External printing	E&E15	£ 133,888	£ 33,888	£ 33,888					Low risk. Based on post covid working practices	C Owen	Cabinet
Grants to external agencies	E&E16	£ 565,580	£ 200,000		£ 200,000				Possible risk to sustainability	H Jones	Cabinet
Hire of room	E&E17	£ 187,000	£ 17,000	£ 17,000					Low risk. Based on post covid working practices	S Brennan	Cabinet
			£ 1,010,888	£ 810,888	£ 200,000	£ -	£ -	£ -			

Appendix 6 – Budget solutions

Workstream	Ref	Budget	Saving	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	Risk/Impact	Lead officer	Relevant Cabinet Board
Accommodation											
Buildings to be vacated - Clossure of 5 satellite office buildings in phase 1 (2023/24) - see below for detail	ACC1	£ 450,000	£ 293,000	£ 158,000		£ 135,000			Low risk - sufficient capacity in other buildings	S Brennan	Cabinet
Phase 1 Buildings to be retained	ACC2	£ 2,045,126	£ 100,000			£ 100,000			Low risk - sufficient capacity in other buildings	S Brennan	Cabinet
Lonlas archive close it 24/25	ACC3	£ 35,702	£ 35,702		£ 35,702				Potential insufficient storage facility	S Brennan	Cabinet
Buildings for further consideration	ACC4	£ 1,371,106	£ 87,000			£ 87,000			Low risk - sufficient capacity in other buildings	S Brennan	Cabinet
Depots	ACC5		£ 60,000		£ 60,000				Low risk - alternatives available	S Brennan	Cabinet
		£ 3,901,934	£ 575,702	£ 158,000	£ 95,702	£ 322,000	£ -	£ -			
Phase 1 - Buildings to be vacated											
Building	Tenure	Current cost £									
Forge Road	Freehold	13,240									
36 Orchard Street	Leased	19,580									
Cimla Hospital	Leased	62,700									
Baglan Resource Centre	Leased	45,080									
Ffrwdwyllt House	Freehold	32,203									
Total		172,803									
Budgeted Saving		158,000									
Budget retained for unforeseen costs		14,803									

Appendix 6 – Budget solutions

Workstream	Ref	Saving	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	Risk/Impact	Lead officer	Relevant Cabinet Board
Grants										
Maximisation of external grant funding	GR1	£ 850,000	£ 500,000	£ 350,000				Compliance with grant terms and conditions	S Brennan	Cabinet
Offset ALN post against existing grant	GR2	£ 63,190	£ 63,190					Grant ceases and no base budget	A D Thomas	Cabinet
Catering business administrative post against grant	GR3	£ 48,000	£ 48,000					Grant ceases and no base budget	A D Thomas	Cabinet
		£ 961,190	£ 611,190	£ 350,000	£ -	£ -	£ -			

Appendix 6 – Budget solutions

Workstream	Ref	Budget	Saving	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	Risk/Impact	Lead officer	Relevant Cabinet Board
Subsidy removal - Detail in narrative of Cabinet report											
Margam Park	SUB1	£ 556,526	£ 556,526	£ 100,000	£ 200,000	£ 256,526			Risk that subsidy cannot be removed	A D Thomas	ES&W
Increased income at skills and training unit	SUB2	£ -	£ 25,000	£ 25,000					Low risk - should be deliverable	A D Thomas	ES&W
Full cost recovery of school cleaning service	SUB3	£ 167,275	£ 167,275	£ 167,275					Low risk. Schools to fund	A D Thomas	ES&W
Gnoll County Park	SUB4	£ 85,344	£ 85,344	£ 30,000	£ 30,000	£ 25,344			Risk that subsidy cannot be removed	M Roberts	ES&W
Princess Royal theatre	SUB5	£ 117,879	£ 117,880		£ 58,940	£ 58,940			Risk that subsidy cannot be removed	A D Thomas	ES&W
Afan forest park	SUB6	£ 1,882	£ 1,882	£ 1,882					Risk that subsidy cannot be removed	S Brennan	ES&W
Metal box	SUB7	£ 556,520	£ 556,521		£ 185,507	£ 185,507	£ 185,507		Risk that subsidy cannot be removed	S Brennan	ER&S
Pontardawe Arts Centre	SUB8	£ 197,888	£ 197,888		£ 98,944	£ 98,944			Risk that subsidy cannot be removed	A D Thomas	ES&W
Leisure Services	SUB0	£ 4,000,000	£ 600,000	£ 250,000	£ 350,000				Risk that subsidy cannot be removed	A D Thomas	ES&W
			£ 2,308,316	£ 574,157	£ 923,391	£ 625,261	£ 185,507	£ -			

Appendix 6 – Budget solutions

Workstream	Ref	Budget	Saving	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	Lead officer	Relevant Cabinet Board
<u>Service Remodelling and integration</u>										
Digital Savings (Mobile and Photocopier contracts)	SERV1	£ 568,000	£ 150,000	£ 150,000					C Owen	Cabinet
Resource Centre (ELRS)	SERV2	£ 12,188	£ 12,188		£ 12,188				A D Thomas	ES&W
			£ 162,188	£ 150,000	£ 12,188	£ -	£ -	£ -		

Appendix 6 – Budget solutions

Workstream	Ref	Budget	Saving	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	Risk/Impact	Lead officer	Relevant Cabinet Board
Other											
Pension Recharges - reduction in historic early access charges as numbers drop	OTHER1	£ 1,639,916	£ 67,000	£ 67,000					None. Annual recharges from Swansea pension which reduces annually	H Jones	Cabinet
Treasury Management - increased interest on investments	OTHER2	£ 20,513,500	£ 500,000	£ 500,000					Low risk-Potential interest rates drop	H Jones	Cabinet
Management of change recharge - Remove base budget for ER/VR use Organisation Development reserve if required	OTHER3	£ 200,000	£ 200,000	£ 200,000					No risk. Schools based ER/VR costs will be met from corporate reserves as one off costs	H Jones	Cabinet
Fall in pupil numbers as per settlement	OTHER4	£ 96,174,000	£ 733,000	£ 733,000					Low risk - funding follows pupils	H Jones	Cabinet
Pension Recharges - reduction in employer contribution rate from 2023/24	OTHER5		£ 5,109,000	£ 5,109,000					Low risk - based on actuarial valuation	H Jones	Cabinet
Reversal of Social Care Levy - reduced employer national insurance contributions	OTHER6	£ 1,364,000	£ 1,364,000	£ 1,364,000					Low risk - government policy	H Jones	Cabinet
Vacancy management target - assumed 5% reduction in salary costs due to natural vacancies / turnover	OTHER7	£ 58,300,000	£ 2,915,000	£ 2,915,000					Risk that there are insufficient vacant posts - will lead to in year overspend	H Jones	Cabinet
Council tax reduction scheme - reduction in claimants since pandemic levels	OTHER8	£ 19,621,000	£ 750,000	£ 750,000					Low risk - based on number of claimants	H Jones	Cabinet
Council tax collection rate - Cabinet approved increase to collection rate of 98% in Nov2022	OTHER9	£ 80,334,000	£ 1,000,000	£ 1,000,000					Risk that historical collection rates not achieved	H Jones	Cabinet
Offset costs against capital programme	OTHER10	£ 260,000	£ 260,000	£ 260,000					Low risk - costs eligible to be capitalised	H Jones	Cabinet
Corporate savings-Cex Budget - various initiatives across the four divisions of the corporate services portfolio - Legal, Finance, Digital and Organisational Development	OTHER11	£ 20,403,000	£ 1,000,000	£ 150,000	£ 250,000	£ 250,000	£ 350,000		Risk that proposals are not delivered within requisite timescales - will lead to in year overspend	H Jones	Cabinet
			£ 13,898,000	£ 13,048,000	£ 250,000	£ 250,000	£ 350,000	£ -			

Appendix 7 – Schedule of reserves

Description	Reserve Balance at 1st April 2023 £	Original budget reserves 2023/24 £	Committed £	Estimated closing reserve 31st March 2024 £
Education, Leisure and Lifelong Learning				
<u>Delegated Schools Reserves</u>				
ERVR Primary	Cr8,161			Cr8,161
Primary Schools	Cr1,899,768			Cr1,899,768
Secondary Schools	Cr1,838,156			Cr1,838,156
Special Schools	Cr582,022			Cr582,022
Middle School	Cr509,605			Cr509,605
Repair & Maintenance	Cr161,160			Cr161,160
	Cr4,998,873	0	0	Cr4,998,873
<u>Education, Leisure and Lifelong Learning Other</u>				
Additional learning needs reserve	Cr1,451,000			Cr1,451,000
Equalisation Account-Education	Cr2,354,500	362,905	244,557	Cr1,747,038
Home to School Transport	0	Cr253,000		Cr253,000
	Cr3,805,500	609,905	244,557	Cr3,451,038
Total Education Leisure & Lifelong Learning	Cr8,804,373	609,905	244,557	Cr8,449,911
<u>Social Services, Health and Housing</u>				
Homecare ECM Equipment reserve	Cr96,756	6,756		Cr90,000
Community Care Transformation Reserve	Cr2,249,661	1,499,661		Cr750,000
Children's Residential Placements	0			0
SSHH IT Renewals Fund	Cr1,900,000			Cr1,900,000
Social Services Equalisation	Cr3,370,114	2,873,873		Cr496,241
Community Resilience Fund	Cr1,750,000			Cr1,750,000
Housing Warranties Reserve	Cr220,000	0		Cr220,000
Hillside General Reserve	Cr431,098	0		Cr431,098

Appendix 7 – Schedule of reserves

Description	Reserve Balance at 1st April 2023 £	Original budget reserves 2023/24 £	Committed £	Estimated closing reserve 31st March 2024 £
Ring fenced homecare funding	Cr234,000	0		Cr234,000
Youth Offending Team Reserve	Cr167,897	0		Cr167,897
Adoption Service	Cr500,000	500,000		0
Total Social Services, Health and Housing	Cr10,919,526	5,380,290	0	Cr6,039,236
<u>Environment</u>				
Transport Reserve	Cr274,153	60,000		Cr214,153
Asset Recovery Incentive Scheme	Cr44,593			Cr44,593
Swansea Bay City Deal	Cr221,000			Cr221,000
Local Development Plan	Cr363,124	76,787		Cr286,337
Parking improvement	Cr63,000	63,000		0
DARE Reserve	Cr2,000,000			Cr2,000,000
Waste Reserve	Cr988,152	900,000		Cr88,152
Winter Maintenance Reserve	Cr604,429			Cr604,429
Neath Market	Cr253,107			Cr253,107
Baglan Bay Innovation centre - dilapidation reserve	Cr77,517			Cr77,517
Renewable Energy Reserve	Cr17,959			Cr17,959
Environmental Health - Housing Equalisation	Cr95,000	58,301		Cr36,699
LAWDC Contingency Reserve	Cr815,177			Cr815,177
Workways - NPT	Cr290,435			Cr290,435
Environment Equalization Reserve	Cr696,513	147,556		Cr548,957
Metal box Reserve	Cr779,909	Cr305,333		Cr1,085,242
Pantteg Landslip Reserve	Cr500,000			Cr500,000

Appendix 7 – Schedule of reserves

Description	Reserve Balance at 1st April 2023 £	Original budget reserves 2023/24 £	Committed £	Estimated closing reserve 31st March 2024 £
	0			0
<u>Trading Account</u>	0			0
Operating Account -Equalisation	Cr36,043			Cr36,043
Vehicle Tracking	Cr92,186			Cr92,186
Vehicle Renewals	Cr3,081,484	2,275,246		Cr806,238
Total Environment	Cr11,293,781	3,275,557	0	Cr8,018,224
<u>Chief Executives</u>				
Elections Equalisation Fund	Cr365,139	Cr15,000		Cr380,139
Health & Safety/Occupational Health	Cr40,501			Cr40,501
Digital Transformation Reserve	Cr1,170,000			Cr1,170,000
Schools IT Equalisation (HWB)	Cr270,000	70,000		Cr200,000
Development Fund for Modernisation	Cr76,032			Cr76,032
Digital renewal reserve	Cr1,263,394	400,000		Cr863,394
Chief Executives Equalisation Reserve	Cr180,736	105,000		Cr75,736
Organisational development reserve	Cr4,742,936	280,000	1,059,000	Cr3,403,936
Building Capacity	Cr59,295	52,000		Cr7,295
Voluntary Organisation Reserve	Cr86,430			Cr86,430
Total Corporate Services	Cr8,254,463	892,000	1,059,000	Cr6,303,463
<u>Corporate Other</u>				
Insurance Reserve	Cr4,445,382	280,000		Cr4,165,382
Covid recovery	Cr1,121,000	879,650	241,350	0
Income Generation Reserve	Cr1,713,230			Cr1,713,230

Appendix 7 – Schedule of reserves

Description	Reserve Balance at 1st April 2023 £	Original budget reserves 2023/24 £	Committed £	Estimated closing reserve 31st March 2024 £
Members Community Fund Reserve	Cr513,633		513,633	0
Capital support reserve	Cr683,447			Cr683,447
Hardship relief scheme	Cr2,000,000		2,000,000	0
Service resilience	Cr900,072	819,072	81,000	0
Discretionary fund	0		0	0
Corporate Contingency	Cr3,695,465	2,330,273	500,000	Cr865,192
Treasury Management Equalisation Reserve	Cr7,769,046	2,000,000	0	Cr5,769,046
Accommodation Strategy	Cr2,273,580	0		Cr2,273,580
Total Corporate Other	Cr25,114,855	3,308,995	6,335,983	Cr17,469,877
<u>Joint Committee</u>				
- Margam Discovery Centre - Building Maintenance Reserve	Cr117,107	Cr57,333		Cr174,440
Workways - Regional Reserve	Cr167,991	0		Cr167,991
Environment Legacy Reserve (SWTRA)	Cr59,728	0		Cr59,728
Substance Misuse Area Planning Board	Cr34,847	0		Cr34,847
WB Safeguarding Board Reserve	Cr113,265	0		Cr113,265
Intermediate Care pooled fund	0	0		0
Total Joint Committee	Cr492,938	Cr57,333	0	Cr550,271
Total All Earmarked Reserves	Cr64,879,936	13,409,414	7,639,540	Cr46,830,982
General Reserve	Cr20,150,693	3,500,000	400,000	Cr16,250,693

Appendix 7 – Schedule of reserves

	Reserve Balance at 1st April 2023 £	Original budget reserves 2023/24 £	Committed £	Estimated closing reserve 31st March 2024 £
TOTAL ALL REVENUE RESERVES	Cr85,030,629	16,909,414	8,039,540	Cr63,081,675

Appendix 8 – Summary of consultation responses

Let's Talk Budget 2023-24

Consultation Summary Report

1.0 Background

- 1.1 On 19 January 2023, Cabinet authorised officers to consult members of the public on the Draft Budget Proposals for 2023-24. The public consultation followed a number of pre-consultation engagement activities with stakeholders which took place during autumn 2022.
- 1.2 The consultation objectives were to:
- provide a mechanism for people to contribute their views to the budget setting process
 - establish how people feel about the proposals
 - find out if people agree or disagree with the proposals and the reasons why
 - provide a mechanism for people to make comments and suggestions linked to specific proposals
 - provide a mechanism for people to suggest alternative proposals for saving money to those already outlined by the council
 - ensure that the consultation was available to as many residents and organisations as possible

2.0 Consultation Process

- 2.1 A range of engagement and consultation activities took place in order to help inform the 2023-24 budget setting process, as follows:

Date	Activity	No. of people Reached
19.1-10.2.23	Online questionnaires and paper versions with feedback boxes in public buildings	581 responses
19.1-10.2.23	Dedicated email address for questions and responses	13
27.1-1.2.23	Internal consultation including chief officers' questions and answer sessions (9 meetings at council buildings, including 1 hybrid F2F/Teams meeting, plus 1 MS Teams meeting)	225 attendees
20.1-9.2.23	Stakeholder consultation (scrutiny committees, Staff Council, Youth Council, Voluntary Sector Liaison Forum, Town and Community Councils Liaison Forum,	143
6.2.23	Online public meeting	4
TOTAL		966

- 1.3 The consultation was promoted via:
- The council website - homepage (via the 'top tasks' button) and Let's Talk pages
 - Adverts/posters on TV screens in the Neath and Port Talbot Bus Stations and Neath Train Station

Appendix 8 – Summary of consultation responses

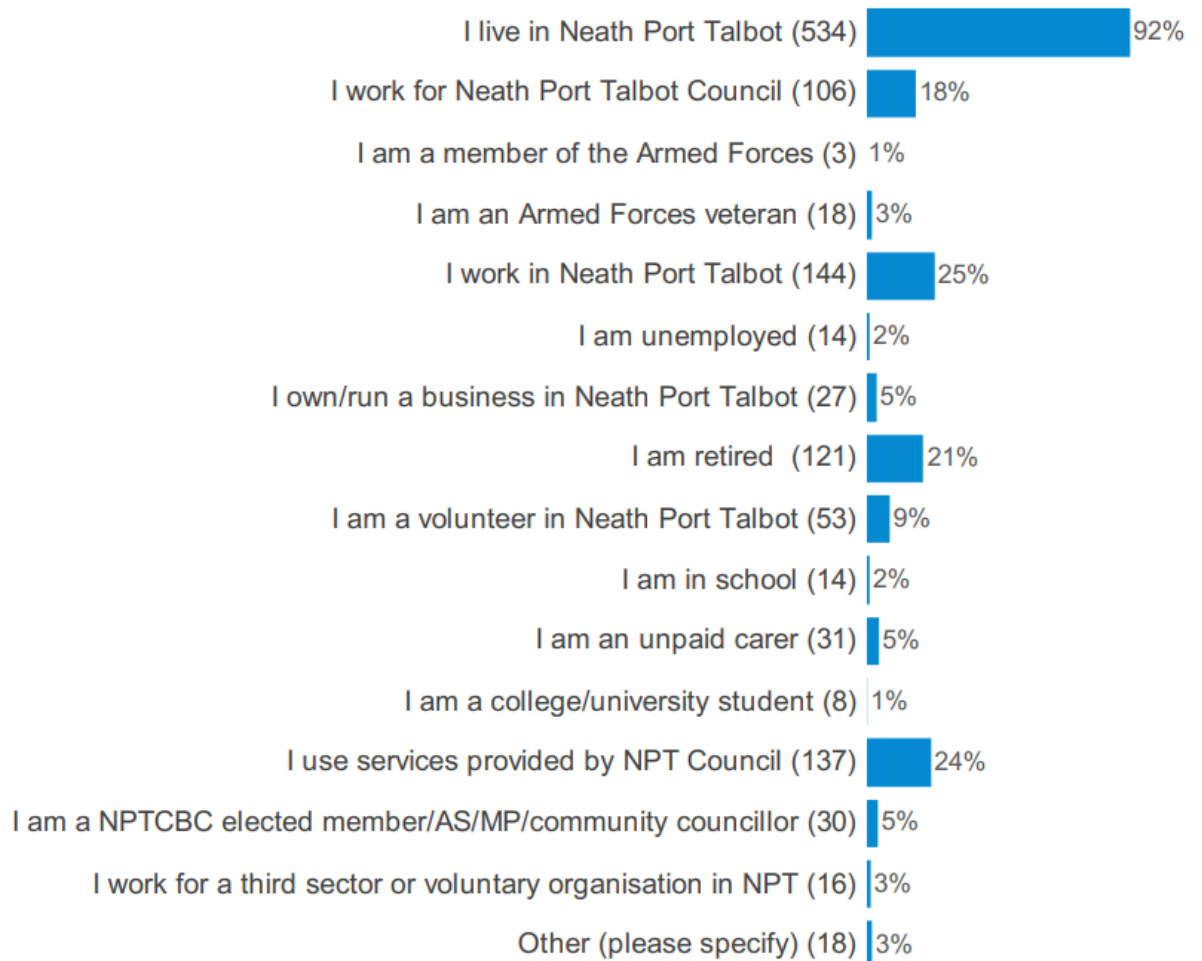
- Posters and an explainer leaflet at libraries, Celtic Leisure venues, civic centres and other public buildings
- The council's corporate social media accounts
- An explainer video published on the council's website and social media channels
- Press coverage generated by cabinet reports and press releases

3.0 Public Consultation Responses

3.1 A total of 581 questionnaires were completed during the consultation period (579 in English and 2 in Welsh, with 484 responding online and 97 on paper). The following charts show a summary of responses:

3.2 [About the respondents](#)

Respondents were asked to describe themselves from a series of statements (*n.b. for this question respondents were asked to select all of the categories that applied to them, some selected more than one answer, therefore the number of responses is greater than the number of respondents*):

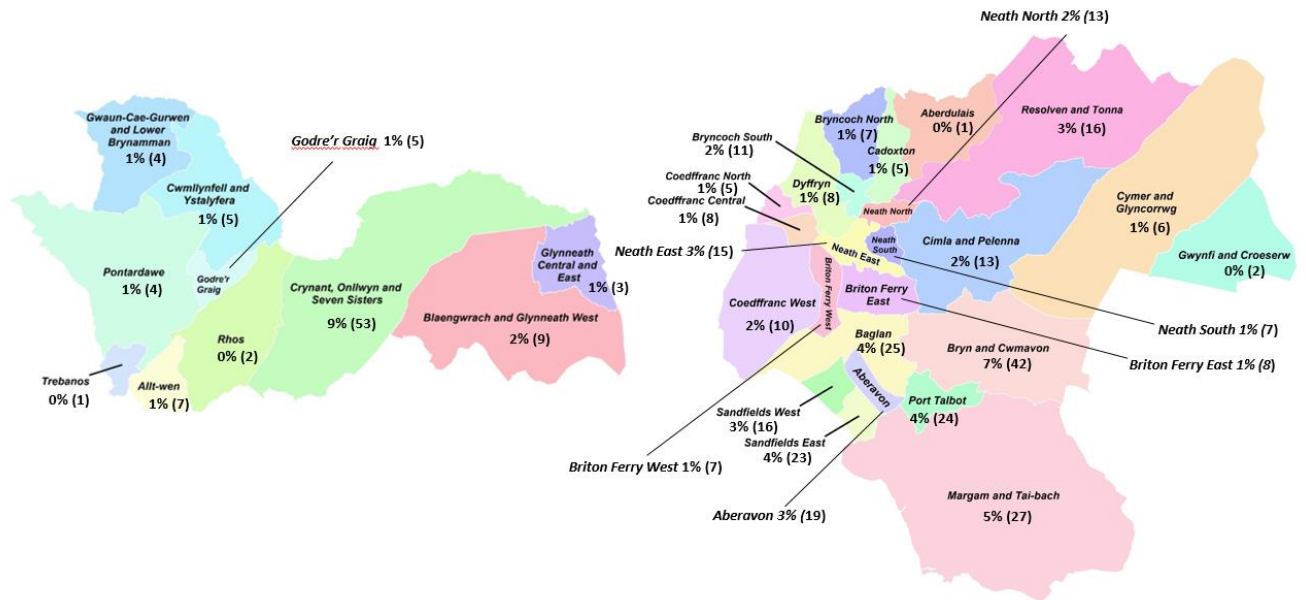


Respondents by ward:

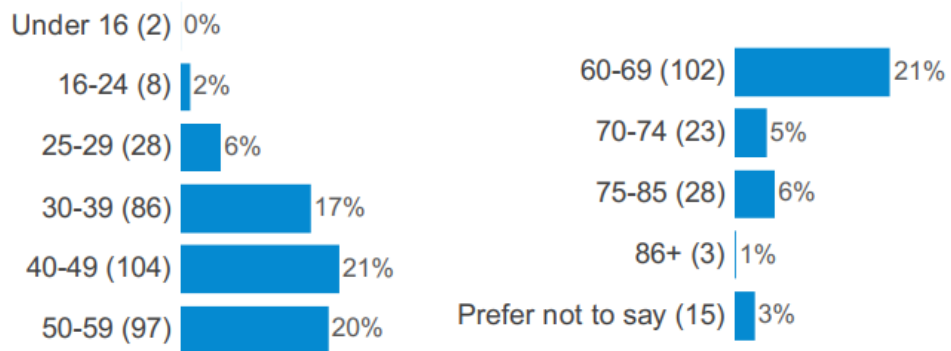
Appendix 8 – Summary of consultation responses

The geographical spread of respondents is outlined on the ward map below. Please note that:

- 126 respondents chose not to provide their postcode
- 5 postcodes were outside of NPT
- 28 provided a partial or invalid postcode

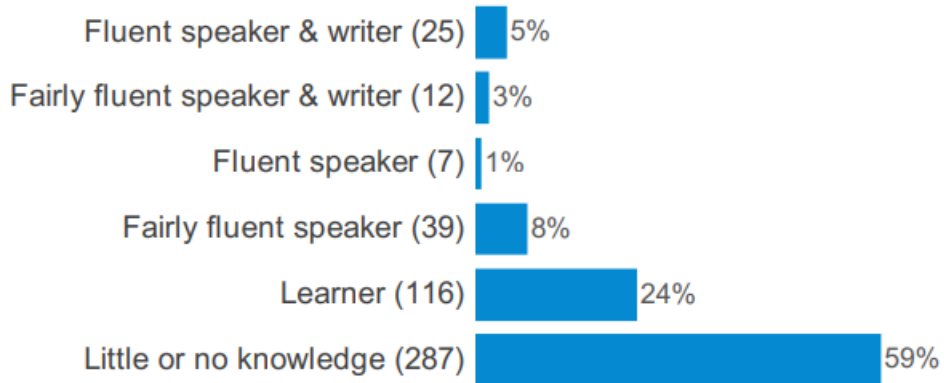


The age profile of respondents was as follows:



When asked about their level of fluency in Welsh, responses were as follows:

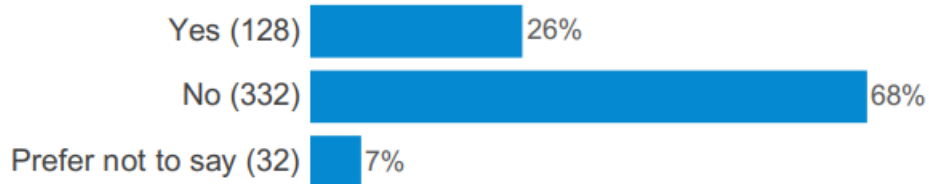
Appendix 8 – Summary of consultation responses



Respondents were also asked if they were pregnant or on maternity leave:

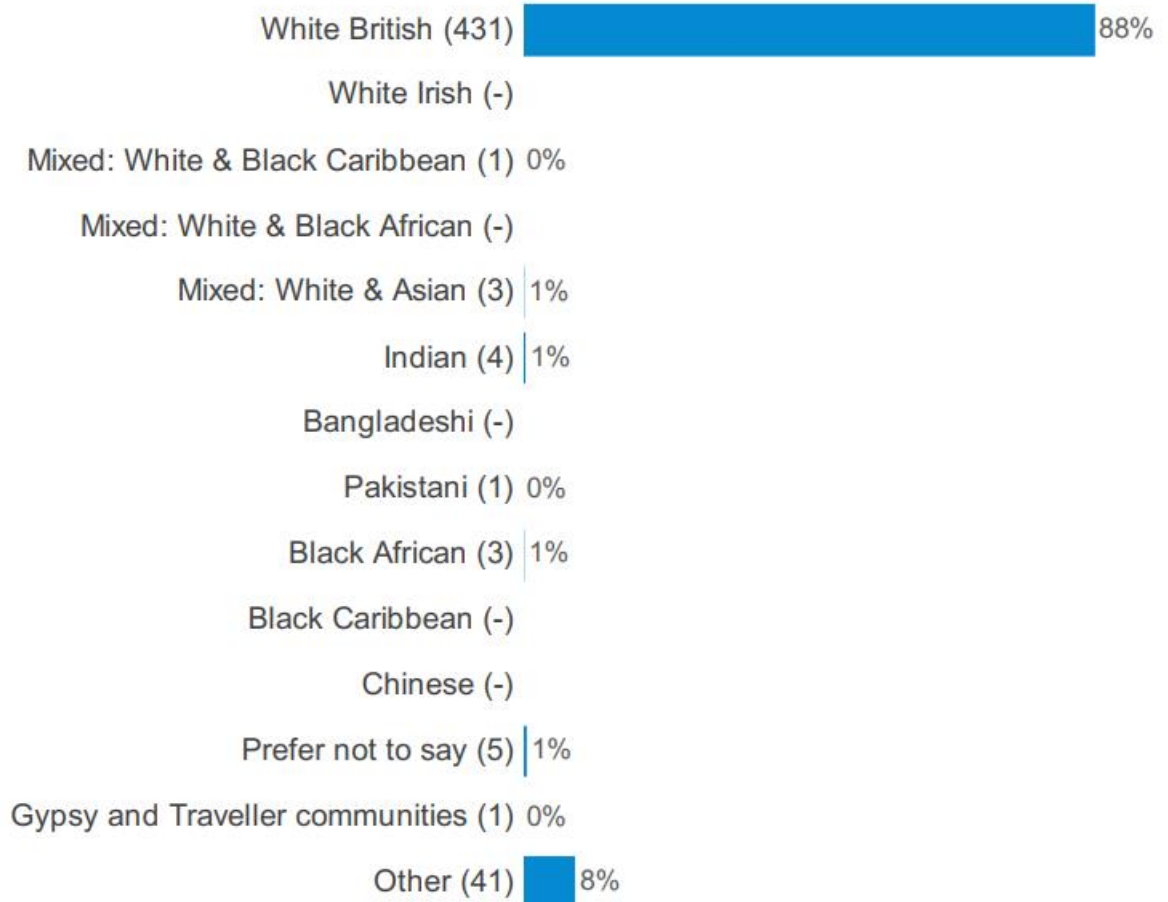


The response to whether respondents considered themselves to have a disability was as follows:

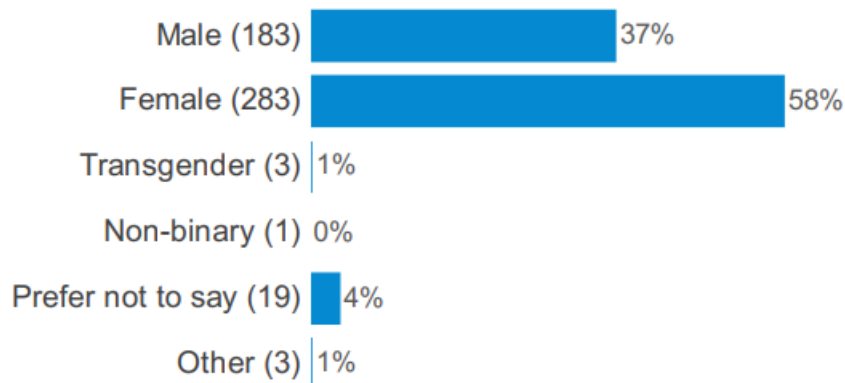


Respondents were asked to indicate their ethnic origin:

Appendix 8 – Summary of consultation responses

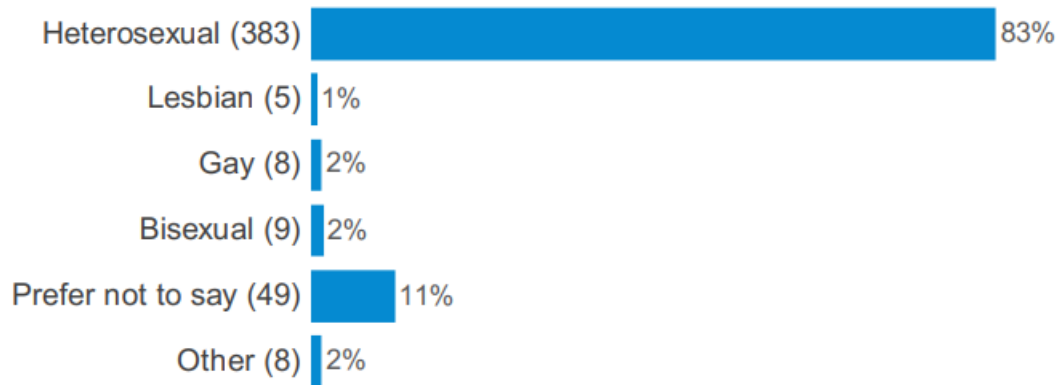


The breakdown in terms of sex of respondents was:

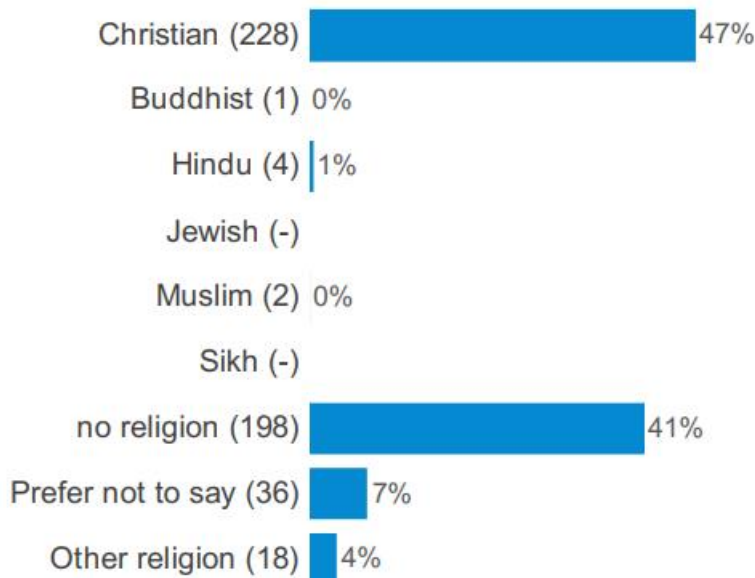


When asked about sexual orientation, responses were as follows:

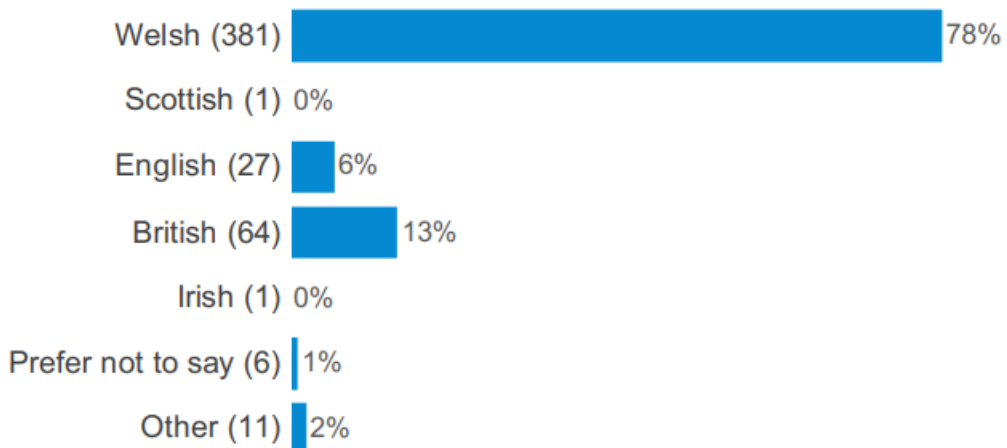
Appendix 8 – Summary of consultation responses



Respondents were asked to indicate their religion / belief:



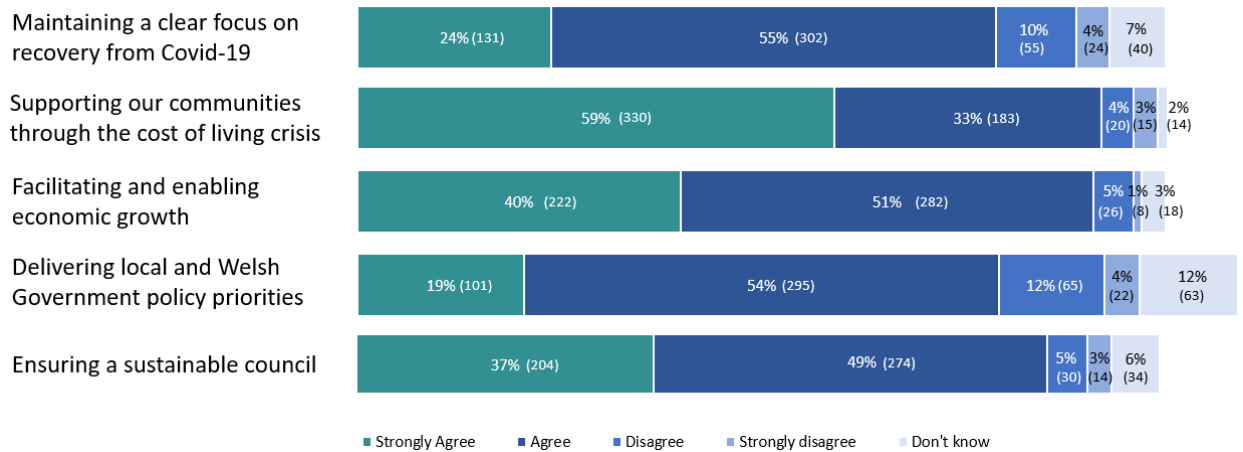
Finally, in terms of nationality, respondents identified as follows:



Appendix 8 – Summary of consultation responses

3.3 Key Objectives

The 5 key objectives that the draft budget strategy is based on were outlined and respondents were asked to indicate to what extent they agree with these:



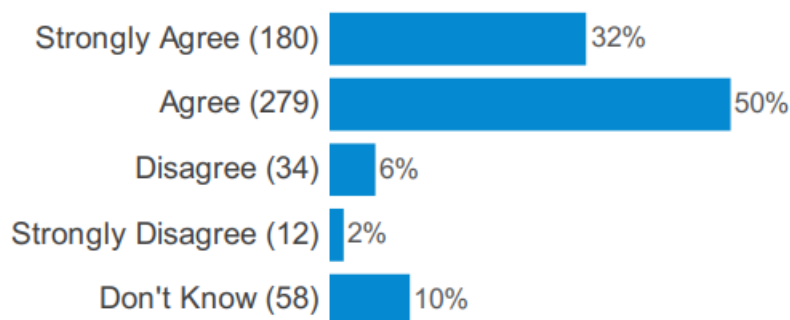
Consultation Themes - Key Objectives

Respondents were invited to expand on their responses to the question on key objectives and the following themes emerged:

- there was a high level of support for the five proposed areas of focus
- there were some concerns about WG policy priorities and whether sufficient funding accompanied these
- there were some comments that COVID-19 should now be behind us suggesting a lack of understanding of the ongoing impact

3.4 General Reserves

When asked how they feel about the proposal to use £3.5 million from general reserves to balance the budget in 2023/24, responses were as follows:



Consultation Themes - Use of Reserves

Respondents were invited to expand on their responses to the question on the use of reserves and the following themes emerged:

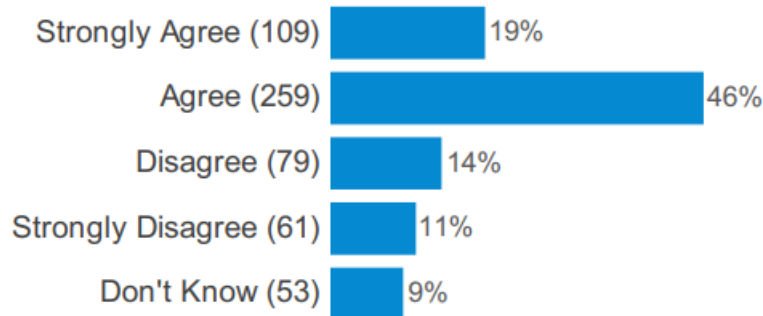
- there was a high level of support for using reserves next year

Appendix 8 – Summary of consultation responses

- Some respondents expressed concern about the use of reserves if this created a risk to the sustainability of the Council

3.5 Specific Reserves

Respondents were asked how they 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:



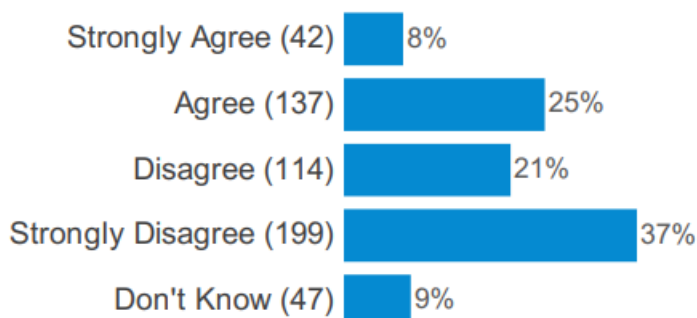
Consultation Themes - Leisure Services

Respondents were invited to expand on their responses to the question on the use of specific reserves to help meet the cost of running indoor leisure services whilst further options are developed and the following themes emerged:

- the majority of respondents supported this citing wellbeing
- however, a significant number of respondents did not support this complaining that users of the service should fund the costs of the service and that the Council's funds would be better directed to Education and Social Services

3.6 Council Tax

In terms of how they feel about the proposal to increase council tax by 4.5% next year, responses were as follows:



Consultation Themes - Council Tax

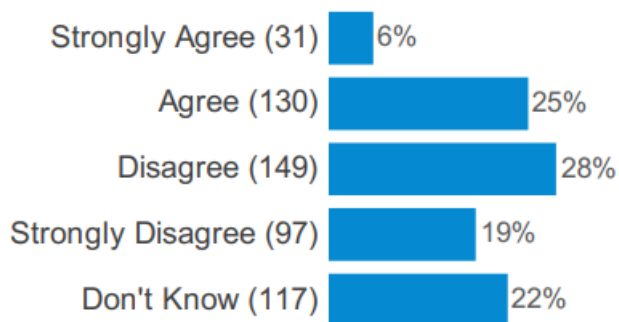
Appendix 8 – Summary of consultation responses

Respondents were invited to expand on their responses to the question on the proposal to increase council tax by 4.5% next year and the following themes emerged:

- 33% strongly agreed/ agreed that council tax should rise by 4.5% stating that costs had risen so there was a need to raise income
- others were concerned about the impact on households, particularly those most impacted by cost of living
- there were many comments about the relative high levels of council tax here compared to other parts of Wales and whether this meant council services were value for money

3.7 [Fees and Charges](#)

When asked how they feel about the proposal to review fees and charges in line with inflation (currently at 10%), responses were as follows:



Consultation Themes - Fees and Charges

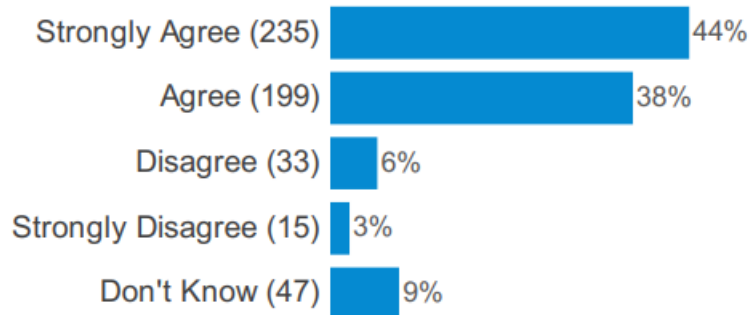
Respondents were invited to expand on their responses to the question on the proposal to increase fees and charges in line with inflation and the following themes emerged:

- 31% strongly agreed/agreed that fees and charges should increase in line with inflation, recognising that services need to be paid for
- Respondents who disagreed felt that 10% increase was too high citing the impact this would have on those experiencing hardship as a result of the cost of living crisis

3.8 [Satellite buildings](#)

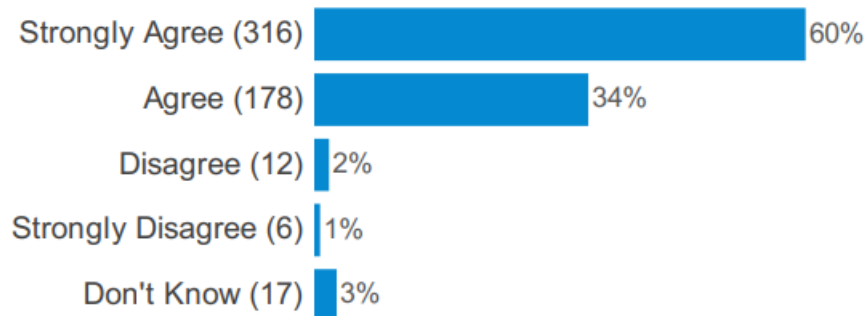
As part of a strategy to reduce costs, the draft budget included a proposal to close a number of satellite buildings and relocate staff from these to the main civic centres. Respondents were asked if they agree with this proposal:

Appendix 8 – Summary of consultation responses



3.8 Energy Costs

The draft budget proposals stated that "Energy costs are anticipated to rise by 162% in 2023/24, and the council is looking for ways to reduce energy consumption". When asked if they agree that the council should do this, responses were as follows:



Consultation Themes - Accommodation and Energy

Respondents were invited to expand on their responses to the question on accommodation and energy and the following themes emerged:

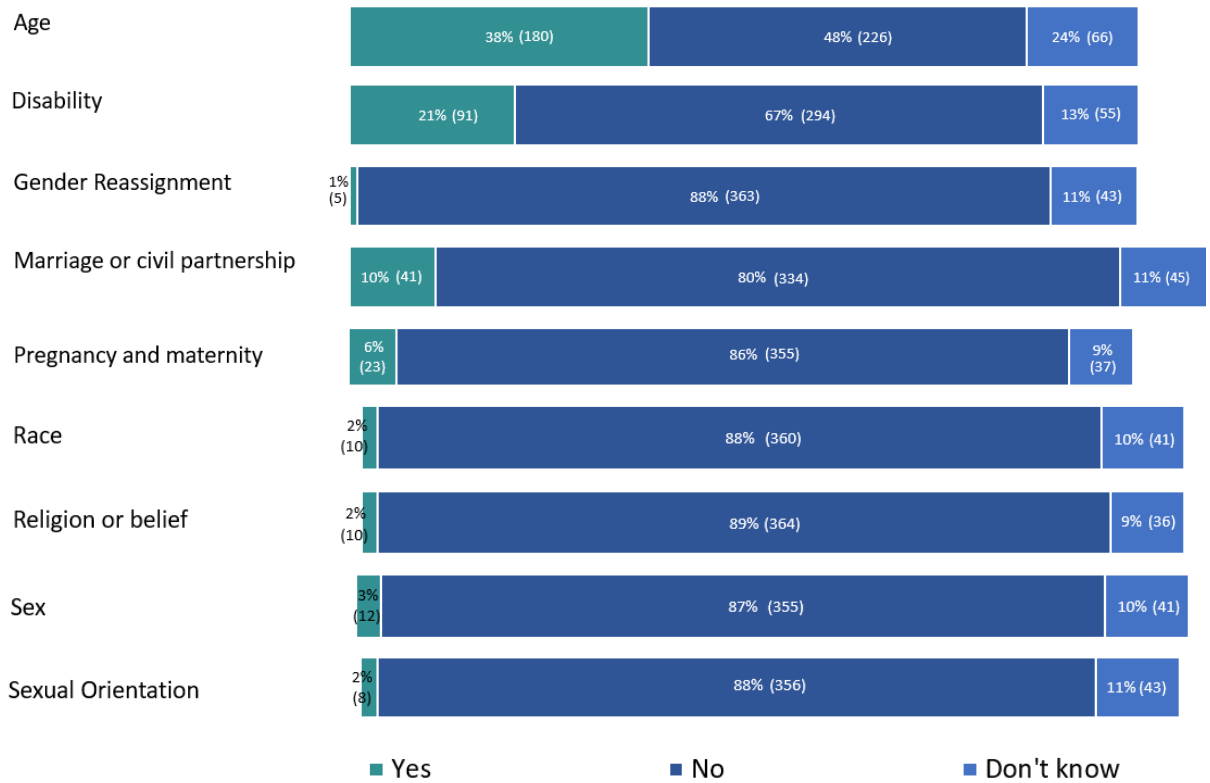
- Over 80% of respondents support the proposal to close satellite buildings and reduce energy consumption
- A number of schools expressed concern about the proposed 50% additional allocation feeling this would impact on their service

3.9 Other questions to inform the Integrated Impact Assessment

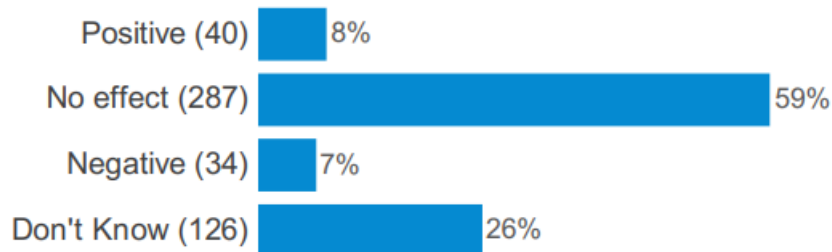
Respondents were asked a series of additional questions to help inform the Integrated impact assessment. These were as follows:

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

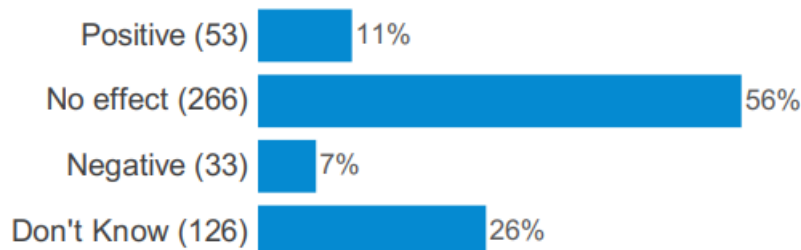
Appendix 8 – Summary of consultation responses



What effect do you think our Draft Budget 2023/24 proposals will have on people's opportunities to use the Welsh Language?



What effect do you think our Draft Budget 2023/24 proposals will have on treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language?



Appendix 8 – Summary of consultation responses

An annexe has been prepared which includes all suggestions received along with officer commentary as part of the pre consultation engagement and also during the formal consultation process. The Annexe also includes the thirteen written responses received.

Summary of Suggestions still under consideration

- YDT (registered as a warm space) - with regard land at the back of the building, we asked if we can buy the land – it would be an opportunity for the council to raise money. Also, have you thought about solar panels on buildings?
- Can we go and speak to the bigger companies to see if they will be more forthcoming? / Could we look at some sort of corporate fund from these big companies?
- Sell Aberavon Shopping Centre Multi-Storey Car Park
- Review security arrangements now CCTV is 24/7
- Develop room hire 'offer' to maximise use of Council accommodation
- Limit external room hire
- Many suggestions to increase income by taking a more commercial approach
- Maximise the use of external funding
- Foster carers – feasibility of improving in-house 'offer' to reduce reliance on external/independent foster carers
- Set a clear policy for 'community hubs' to improve access for communities and promote more joined up working – reduce duplication etc
- Identify further measures to prevent/intervene early to limit the number of people in crisis
 - Review internal charging arrangements
 - Process reviews – mail monitoring; business support; performance data; room booking; upskill staff in systems thinking; debt management; i-Trent
 - Customer service – customer portal; user centric design;
 - Succession planning- expand apprentice and trainee programmes;
 - Promote flexible retirement and flexible working
 - Limit travel and maximise use of video conferencing
 - Review street lighting
 - Introduction of vending machines

Appendix 8 – Summary of consultation responses

- Pricing of services – optimise this to accommodate different levels of service and ability to pay
- Review mayoral model
- Social Impact Bonds
- Sell land and assets
- More robust enforcement – litter; dog fouling; Proceeds of Crime;
- Reduce frequency of waste collection
- More plant based options in school catering
- Use more therapists in the assessment of care packages to ‘right-size’ care packages
- Greater use of digital solutions in the delivery of some aspects of care – medication management
- Consider more shared services – internally and with other organisations
- Focus on tourism, economic development
- Switch council tax demands to digital notification
- Digital timesheets for streetcare services
- Encourage more volunteering
- Community lottery

Workstreams already being progressed as part of the Medium Term Financial Plan (incorporating suggestions and comments from pre-consultation and consultation phases)

- ❖ **Accommodation**
 - A phased review is now underway
- ❖ **Energy**
 - Initial urgent focus on reducing consumption
 - Short term focus on energy efficiency
 - Medium-long term focus on transition to renewables
- ❖ **Transport and Fleet**
 - Short term options for better utilisation – will include potential policy changes
 - Medium-long term options for reducing and transitioning the current fleet to renewables
- ❖ **Commissioning and Procurement**
 - Series of reviews to examine all external spend – efficiency and economy savings; market mix and value for money
- ❖ **Budget re-basing**
 - Complete work commenced in 2022-23
- ❖ **Statutory Services - Service Re-modelling**

Appendix 8 – Summary of consultation responses

- In-depth consideration of service models to meet forecast need within anticipated funding limits
- ❖ **Discretionary Services – remodelling**
- Alternative sources of income and efficiency measures
- ❖ **Automation and process improvement**
- Deliver agreed pipeline of reviews – will also underpin other reviews
- ❖ **Empty Homes – Council Tax**
- Review of Council Tax levels for empty homes – consultation early 2023-24
- ❖ **Fees and Charges**
- Root and branch review of policy to inform the setting of fees and charges into future years

Appendix 9 – Integrated Impact Assessment

This Integrated Impact Assessment considers the duties and requirements of the following legislation in order to inform and ensure effective decision making and compliance:

- **Equality Act 2010**
- **Welsh Language Standards (No.1) Regulations 2015**
- **Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015**
- **Environment (Wales) Act 2016**

1. Details of the initiative

	Title of the Initiative: Draft budget proposals 2023/24
1a	Service Area: Services as identified across the directorates
1b	Directorate: All
1c	<p>Summary of the initiative:</p> <p>This Integrated Impact Assessment relates to the Council’s budget proposals for 2023/24.</p> <p>The Draft Budget proposals include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Investment of £11.9m in additional service pressures over and above cost increases arising as a result of inflationary pressures. ➤ Savings of £15.352m none of which relate to cuts to services ➤ Use of reserves of £4.9m (£1.4m specific & £3.5m general) to assist in balancing the budget ➤ An increase in Council tax of 4.5% ➤ A proposed increase to a range of fees and charges

Appendix 9 – Integrated Impact Assessment

	<p>The Council is legally required to produce a balance budget. In setting its budget the Council utilises funding received via the financial settlement from the Welsh Government including share of Non Domestic Rates, additional grants for specific service areas along with income from council tax.</p>
<p>1d</p>	<p>Who will be directly affected by this initiative?</p> <p>Residents and future residents of Neath Port Talbot, users of Council services, the Council’s directly employed workforce, the workforces and owners/trustees of organisations who are commissioned to operate services on the Council’s behalf through contracts for service, grants or other partnership arrangements, partners, funders and trade union representatives.</p>
<p>1e</p>	<p>When and how were people consulted?</p> <p>The Council undertook a number of engagement activities as part of its process in drawing up the draft revenue budget proposals. The engagement activities provided an early opportunity for a wide range of stakeholders to feed ideas into the budget process and to shape the overall strategy. Activities included: an all-Member seminar; briefings held virtually and face to face with staff and trade union representatives; discussions with primary and secondary headteacher representatives as well as the Schools Forum; Members of the Cabinet also held twelve engagement sessions across the County Borough to explain the financial position the Council is facing to residents and held a number of meetings with Members of the Senedd and Members of Parliament to explain the Council’s financial position and to seek their support in getting a fair settlement for local government.</p> <p>The Cabinet considered the draft revenue budget for 2023-24 at its January 2023 meeting and authorised formal public consultation between 19th January and 10th February 2023.</p>

	<p>A separate budget consultation report is included with this report and that summarises the consultation activities, responses received and main themes emerging. A separate schedule has also been prepared listing all narrative comments received during the pre-consultation and consultation phases together with the office responses to each comment.</p>
<p>1f</p>	<p>What were the outcomes of the consultation?</p> <p>Key objectives – there was broad agreement to the five key objectives that provide the strategic framework for the budget proposals</p> <p>Council Tax – 33% agreed/strongly agreed that Council Tax should increase by 4.5% with respondents commenting that costs have increased so income needs to increase to pay for services. 58% disagreed/strongly disagreed expressing concern about the cost of living pressures and a further 9% did not know whether Council tax should increase, or not</p> <p>Reserves – 82% agreed/strongly agreed that reserves should be used to balance the budget in 2023-24. 10% did not know if reserves should be used.</p> <p>Use of Specific Reserves to fund Celtic Leisure indoor leisure services in 2023-24- 65% agreed/strongly agreed but 25% disagreed/strongly disagreed with this proposal. Where respondents disagreed it was mainly because they felt there were more important priorities for investment.</p> <p>Increase fees and charges by inflation (10%) - 31% agreed/strongly agreed with this proposal and 47% Disagreed/strongly disagreed. 22% did not know. Where respondents disagreed it was related to concerns about cost of living pressures.</p> <p>Closure of satellite offices and reduction in energy consumption - there was a high level of support for both of these options. Some schools expressed concern about an uplift of 50% in their energy budgets concerned at the impact energy costs could have on other activities</p>

The Labour Group did not comment specifically on the budget proposals but offered a number of suggestions for increasing income and reducing expenditure. Many of these have been considered within the budget process. New suggestions are under consideration.

The NPT CVS responding on behalf of the Third Sector acknowledged the pressures on the Council and was positive about the openness of the consultation. Early notice of impacts on the sector were requested noting that the Council was unable to confirm impacts fully as many Welsh Government grants were yet to be confirmed.

Changes to original proposals

Council Tax – a number of additional mitigation actions have been identified to reduce the impact of the proposed 4.5% of some residents. These include additional welfare rights workers to help residents maximise their income; improved means testing arrangements to create a ‘tell us once’ model; faster payments to some micros businesses and SMEs; additional joint working to support residents in debt management and recovery processes.

Fees and Charges – a reduction in the income target from circa £2million to £800k. Most charges within the Council’s control to be inflated by 5% not 10%. Pest control fees to be frozen at 2022-23 levels and car parking to increase by a quantum of £200k with detailed options to be presented to Cabinet following the setting of the budget.

Vulnerable young people – A proposed time-limited budget to provide targeted support to those most vulnerable young people who are struggling to re-engage with their learning. This will be a joint initiative between secondary schools, education and children’s services departments.

2. Evidence

What evidence was used in assessing the initiative?

Service areas collect and more importantly utilise data on service users as part of the ongoing development and delivery of individual services. In addition to the number of people using the service other relevant information such as age, sex, disability, etc., is also collected which in turn informs policy development and service provision.

Detailed analysis of a range of budget heads was carried to examine how spending patterns had changed over the pandemic period. This identified circa £1 million of surplus budgets related to office expenditure. The detailed proposals were consulted upon with service managers prior to being confirmed in the final budget proposal.

A survey of managers who control fees and charges was undertaken to establish which fees and charges were within the Council's control, risks associated with a proposed increase of 10% and also to eliminate any double counting of income related to leisure services where a subsidy reduction target has been identified. The feedback from service managers was considered alongside the public consultation feedback to arrive at the final budget proposals. A fuller review will be conducted in 2023-24 to inform policy for future years.

In terms of inflation, factors built into budget assumptions were drawn from published government reports, the Institute for Fiscal Studies analyses and by benchmarking with other local authorities.

Service pressures were developed from service activity data. Contract price changes were drawn from final tender prices or from open book exercises reaching conclusion.

The public consultation questionnaire specifically asked respondents to comment on how the budget proposal would impact on them.

3. Equalities

a) How does the initiative impact on people who share a protected characteristic?

Protected Characteristic	Why will it have this impact?
Age Disability Gender reassignment Marriage & civil partnership Pregnancy and maternity Race Religion or belief Sex	<p>The questionnaire used during the public consultation specifically asked respondents to indicate whether they felt the draft Budget 2023/24 proposals would have an impact on them and/or their family because of any of the 9 protected characteristics set out in the Equality Act 2010.</p> <p>Of those that responded, the numbers indicated that the proposals would have an impact were as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Age – 38% (180). The main themes in the reasons for the responses to this included an increase in council tax would increased financial pressures for those living on pensions, as well as making it harder for young people to afford a house and start a family. It was also felt that economic growth and good jobs are needed for young people to progress with a career. There were concerns

Appendix 9 – Integrated Impact Assessment

<p>Sexual orientation</p>	<p>from younger people that cuts to the education budget might impact on education and outside of school activities. People in the older age groups were also concerned about cuts to services and potential for social isolation. Two people. Some felt it was important to continue to be able to access leisure and library services, whilst one objected to paying more council tax to subsidise leisure services.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disability – 21% (91). The main themes in the reasons for the responses to this included concerns about increase in council tax; some are already feeling financial pressures; more services/support needed for disabled people and those with learning disabilities; concerns about parking, including accessibility and cost; concerns about isolation; feeling that it is important to keep leisure facilities; concerns about people’s mental health being affected. • Gender reassignment – 1% (5). There were reasons given for the responses relating to gender reassignment • Marriage & civil partnership – 10% (41). The main themes in the reasons for the responses to this included concerns about increase in council tax; some are already feeling financial pressures; increased costs will put added strain onto marriages/relationships • Pregnancy and maternity – 6% (23). The main themes in the reasons for the responses to this included that people on maternity pay are already struggling financially, increased financial strain on households, feeling that being pregnant or paying for childcare is not affordable. • Race – 2% (10). One respondent felt that there is a lack of representation of people from black and ethnic minority backgrounds within the area and it should be a priority of NPT Council to support and encourage people from such backgrounds to reside in the area. This respondent asked how the budget supports the Welsh Government’s race equality plan’s requirement for public
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	<p>services and local authorities alike should be making a meaningful difference to the lives of black and ethnic minority people</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Religion or belief – 2% (10). One respondent was concerned that fewer people will go to Church and donations to the Food Banks will decrease.• Sex – 3% (12). There were reasons given for the responses relating to sex• Sexual orientation – 2% (8). There were reasons given for the responses relating to sexual orientation <p>The percentages for responses to the closed questions on each of the key proposals from people who identified with any of the protected characteristics were compared to those of all respondents. The purpose was to identify whether the proposals might disproportionately affect these groups. Any noteworthy variations are outlined below:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• proposal to increase council tax by 4.5% next year 33% of all respondents agreed/strongly agreed with this proposal. Some of the older age groups (50+) were more likely to agree/strongly agree with this proposal (50-59 = 38%, 70-74 = 52%, 75-85 = 53%), although no one in the 86+ age group agreed. Some of the 49 and under age groups were more likely to disagree/strongly disagree (16-24 = 62%, 25-29 = 75%, 30-39 = 68%). None of the respondents who were pregnant or on maternity leave agreed/strongly agreed with this proposal. None of the Hindu, Buddhist or Muslim respondents agreed with this proposal. More male respondents (42%) agreed/strongly agreed with this proposal than Female respondents. Almost double the percentage of respondents (62%) who indicated they were gay agreed or strongly agreed with this proposal compared to the percentage of all respondents (33%)
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- proposal to review fees and charges in line with inflation (currently at 10%)
47% of all respondents disagreed/strongly disagreed with this proposal, this was higher for the 25-29 (52%) and 30-39 (57%) year age groups.
- proposal to close a number of satellite buildings and relocate staff from these to the main civic centre
9% of all respondents disagreed/strongly disagreed with this proposal, this was higher for the 86 years+ (33%) age group

The budget mitigates the impact of the Welsh Government Provisional Settlement of 7.1% which is below the estimated increase in costs – consequently it protects investment for children and young people as it increases budget provision for schools by 8%, children’s social services by over 10% and provides a time limited project budget of £3 million to enable targeted support for young people struggling to re-engage with their learning.

The budget also provides £2.8 million equating to 50% of the energy baseline budget to help schools and children’s services introduce actions that reduce energy consumption and energy costs.

The budget provides an above inflation increase of 15% for social services. This will help stabilise social services for frail, elderly residents, for those disabled and mentally ill people who need care and support and for carers.

Council is committed to prioritising investment in schools and educating children by increasing its investment in schools as demonstrated by a 8% increase in the Delegated Budgets for Schools.

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	<p>An increase in funding for other Education Leisure and Lifelong Learning Services will help to protect services to vulnerable families and children through the provision of additional support for learners as well as funding increased capacity following the roll out of the Additional Learning Needs Legislation.</p> <p>Investment in children’s and adult social services will continue to support people with learning disabilities and general provision towards care package costs. This investment will improve service provision to children and the elderly. Any specific changes to services will be the subject of separate impact assessments.</p>
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What action will be taken to improve positive or mitigate negative impacts?

The activities supported by the time limited project budget will be evaluated to assess the impact on the cohort of young people that will be the focus of the intervention.

Remodelling proposals will be brought forward in 2023-24 to inform the remainder of the medium term financial plan period in relation to the Council’s duties to meet the needs of residents.

b) How will the initiative assist or inhibit the ability to meet the Public Sector Equality Duty?

Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED)	Why will it have this impact?
<p>To eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation</p> <p>To advance equality of opportunity between different groups</p> <p>To foster good relations between different groups</p>	<p>The budget objectives include maintaining a focus on recovery from Covid and supporting communities through the cost of living crisis.</p> <p>Evidence from national reports compiled by the Welsh Government through the Public Health Wales service identify a widening of inequality/inequity over the pandemic period and more recent publications by the Bevan Foundation and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation show that poverty is further deepening as a result of the cost of living crisis. People who share a protected characteristic are particularly impacted.</p> <p>The budget seeks to maintain services in 2023-24 and to maintain security of employment to the maximum extent possible. The budget increases education and social services budgets beyond the funding provided by Welsh Government recognising that more people are seeking additional help from these services at the present time. The budget also proposes additional mitigation for residents through increased welfare rights activity; streamlined means testing; faster payments to some micro businesses and SMEs; and a continuation of joint working with the Third Sector to help those experiencing debt.</p> <p>The budget recognises the continuing pressure on housing services, particularly those that are targeted to people who are homeless and the need to find more move-on accommodation and support.</p>

What action will be taken to improve positive or mitigate negative impacts?
<p>There will continue to be close monitoring of homelessness services and also the services provided to those seeking asylum or who are refugees.</p> <p>The NPT Safe and Well partnership has been refocused on the cost of living crisis and the wider poverty prevention agenda. Shared Prosperity Fund grant has been approved to support the partnership which is jointly led by the Council and Council for Voluntary Services</p>

4. Community Cohesion/Social Exclusion/Poverty

	Why will it have this impact?
Community Cohesion	There is a sustained oversight of homelessness provision and the support being provided to asylum seekers and those who are refugees
Social Exclusion	See above
Poverty	<p>Evidence from national reports compiled by the Welsh Government through the Public Health Wales service identify a widening of inequality/inequity over the pandemic period and more recent publications by the Bevan Foundation and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation show that poverty is further deepening as a result of the cost of living crisis. People who share a protected characteristic are particularly impacted.</p> <p>The Public Services Board has adopted the Council’s wellbeing objectives and has established a partnership to address cost of living and poverty. Additional work in 2023-24 proposed by the Council includes increasing welfare benefits activity,</p>

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	supporting those affected by debt, continuing to signpost people to help and support available within the community, continuing to administer grants to Third Sector organisations who are supporting food banks, period dignity and other similar matters
What action will be taken to improve positive or mitigate negative impacts?	
Officers will continue to gather intelligence through the community and partner agencies to identify where the Council can take additional action to help those continuing to be impacted by covid and the cost of living.	

5. Welsh

	+	-	+/-	Why will it have this effect?
What effect does the initiative have on: – people’s opportunities to use the Welsh language		✓		<p>The Council currently has relatively small numbers of staff with Welsh language skills. Opportunities for staff to use their language skills will continue to be promoted and training will continue to be made available.</p> <p>During the consultation the questionnaire asked respondents to indicate what effect they think the Draft Budget 2023/24 proposals will have on people's opportunities to use the Welsh Language. Of those that responded to this question, the majority (59%/287) thought they would have no effect, 8% (40) thought they would have a positive</p>

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			<p>effect, 7% (34) thought they would have a negative effect and 26% (126) didn't know.</p> <p>Of those who thought they would have a positive effect, the reasons included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• It's good that resources are being used to improve schools in the area with as much attention given to Welsh schools.• Continuing opportunities for adult learners to learn Welsh <p>Of those who thought they would have a negative effect, the reasons included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The need to meet the budget shortfall could lead to what may be considered as non essential plans being scrapped or overseen• On one of the sheets a proposed cut to (library) books is stated. This would clearly mean that libraries would be able to buy far fewer Welsh books than they do now. This will be especially bad for children and learners who would be unable to find a range of books in Welsh• Less money less opportunity to pay for Welsh lessons• If people are unable to participate in community life because of a lack of resources it reduces their opportunity to socialise, which is of crucial importance in learning/extending language skills and confidence
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<p>- treating the Welsh and English languages equally</p>	<p>✓</p>		<p>The Council is committed to the principles as embodied in the Welsh Language Measure (2015) and the standards in particular will continue so that the Welsh language is treated no less favourably than the English language</p> <p>The budget provides funding for a new starter Welsh Medium Primary School, supporting the objectives set out in the Welsh in Education Strategic Plan</p> <p>During the consultation the questionnaire asked respondents to indicate what effect they think the Draft Budget 2023/24 proposals will have on treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language. Of those that responded to this question, the majority (56%/266) thought they would have no effect, 11% (53) thought they would have a positive effect, 7% (33) thought they would have a negative effect and 26% (126) didn't know.</p> <p>Of those who though they would have a positive effect, the reasons included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It's good that resources are being used to improve schools in the area with as much attention given to Welsh schools. • Through treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language, it may open opportunities for more native Welsh speakers to engage in Council events and proposals who may only engage through the Welsh medium. Additionally, it
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				<p>may also serve to improve undertaking in studies of the Welsh language.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Npt is strengthen the provision of Welsh in schools <p>Of those who though they would have a negative effect, the reasons included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welsh language has a low level of visibility and audibility in NPT and changing that would require additional investment • The need to meet the budget shortfall could lead to what may be considered as non essential plans being scrapped or overseen • Translation services must be costing a fortune • Any cut in budget will effect the council's ability to provide services. <p>You have bigger concerns</p>
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What action will be taken to improve positive or mitigate negative impacts?

Officers will monitor the implementation of the proposals.

6. Biodiversity

How will the initiative assist or inhibit the ability to meet the **Biodiversity Duty**?

Biodiversity Duty	+	-	+/-	Why will it have this impact?
To maintain and enhance biodiversity				Unknown. There is no clear route to demonstrate either positive or negative impact on biodiversity.
To promote the resilience of ecosystems, i.e. supporting protection of the wider environment, such as air quality, flood alleviation, etc.				The budget provides additional funding to extend active travel routes

What action will be taken to improve positive or mitigate negative impacts?

Future impacts assessment will benefit from the biodiversity service assessments which are currently being undertaken to help determine what, if any, impacts service areas have on biodiversity. The assessments will help inform where services areas will be required to undertake specific assessments when appropriate to determine the extent and any mitigating actions of future changes to service/policy, etc. as part of delivery of the Biodiversity Duty Plan

7. Wellbeing of Future Generations

How have the five ways of working been applied in the development of the initiative?

Ways of Working	Details
i. Long term – looking at least 10 years (and up to 25 years) ahead	Work has commenced on developing a medium term financial plan to cover the period 2023-2028. This plan highlights that there is a significant financial gap between the estimated funding available and the cost of running Council services over that period. Work will continue during 2023/24 financial year in relation to closing this budget gap. The MTPF directly supports the Corporate Plan which sets out objectives for the next 20 years.
ii. Prevention – preventing problems occurring or getting worse	Proposals protect investment in early intervention and prevention programmes and also provides £3 million time limited funding to target support for young people who are struggling to re-engage with their learning.

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	<p>The budget strategy seeks to provide stability over 2023-24 for the Council to continue its recovery from Covid and to support residents impacted by the cost of living crisis.</p>
<p>iii. Collaboration – working with other services internal or external</p>	<p>Pre-consultation engagement activities enabled a range of stakeholders to shape the budget strategy from an early point. Additionally the NPT PSB has adopted the Council’s wellbeing objectives enabling a close alignment between the Council’s own work and the work of the partnership to be achieved.</p> <p>The Council will work with partners and the wider community as the budget is implemented</p>
<p>iv. Involvement – involving people, ensuring they reflect the diversity of the population</p>	<p>The consultation was communicated as widely as possible given the short window within which we could consult and a significant amount of pre-consultation engagement has taken place.</p>
<p>v. Integration – making connections to maximise contribution to:</p> <p>Council’s wellbeing objectives</p>	<p>The financial settlement and the specific grants that underpin Council services are key to the delivery of the Council’s wellbeing objectives thereby having a positive impact.</p> <p>The proposals will help ensure the business of the Council is managed to maximise the long term benefit for the citizens of Neath Port Talbot (the crosscutting objective relating to governance and resources).</p>

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<p>Other public bodies objectives</p>	<p>It is possible to demonstrate the alignment between the Council’s Corporate Plan, the Public Services Board Plan and other key planning arrangements which will ensure a more holistic approach to improving outcomes over the lifetime of all plans.</p>
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9. Monitoring Arrangements

Provide information on the monitoring arrangements to:

Monitor the impact of the initiative on Equalities, Community Cohesion, the Welsh Measure, Biodiversity Duty and the Wellbeing Objectives.

Officers will monitor the response to the proposals. The achievement of the budget will be set out in revenue budget monitoring reports throughout the year.

10. Assessment Conclusions

Please provide details of the conclusions reached in relation to each element of the assessment:

	Conclusion
Equalities	The budget protects those services that support people who share protected characteristics by providing an increase above the level provided by Welsh Government. Additional funding for young people of £3 million is provided to help those struggling to re-engage with their learning

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	and there is additional mitigating action identified to maximise the income of residents and to help those in debt.
Welsh	The budget proposals do not include any reductions in staff numbers so there should be limited impact on the Welsh language. Opportunities remain for staff to use their language skills will and further training will be made available and promoted. The budget provides investment for the Welsh Medium Starter School
Bio	There is no clear route to demonstrate either positive or negative impact on biodiversity or the resilience of ecosystems however the budget does provide capacity to attract additional funding that can extend active travel routes.
WBFG	<p>The Council has worked hard to strike the right balance in its budget proposals for 2023/24 including the use of £4.9m from reserves to mitigate the impact of council tax rises as much as possible.</p> <p>This has included increases in funding for some services that enable early intervention and prevention activities that reduce demand on public services whilst promoting wellbeing; protection for integrated services that have been established to deliver more joined up services for citizens; protection for services that have a long term impact on sustainability; and protection for key collaborative arrangements. The areas that have received additional funding are reflected in the four Well-being objectives that the Council has set.</p>

Overall Conclusion

The budget seeks to:

- **Enable the Council to continue to deliver its recovery plan**
- **Support NPT communities through the cost of living crisis**
- **Enable the Council to engage with investors**
- **Deliver local and WG policy priorities**
- **Sustain the Council**

The budget seeks to maintain essential services and to protect employment to the maximum extent possible whilst limiting the burden on council tax payers and users of services.

11. Actions

What actions are required in relation to obtaining further data/information, to reduce or remove negative impacts or improve positive impacts?

Action	Who will be responsible for seeing it is done?	When will it be done by?	How will we know we have achieved our objective?
Undertake public consultation on draft budget proposals	Chief Finance Officer	Between 19th January 2023 and 10 th February 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consultation responses received
Consider consultation responses and amend proposals where appropriate	Senior Management Teams	During and at the conclusion of the consultation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revised budget report, including any proposed amendments, for consideration at Cabinet,

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			Cabinet Scrutiny and Council
Present final budget proposals to Cabinet	Corporate Directors Team	1 st March 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approval of a budget for 2023-24
Present final proposals to Council	Cabinet	2 nd March 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approval of the budget and the setting of the Council Tax
Monitor the achievement of the budget	Corporate Directors Team	Quarterly through 2023-24	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expenditure contained within cash limits