

Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council

Cabinet

Report of the Corporate Directors Group

6th March 2024

Matter for Decision

Wards affected – All

2024/25 Revenue budget proposals

Purpose of Report

To seek Cabinet approval for the proposed Council 2024/25 revenue budget including investment in services; savings and income generation proposals; and proposed council tax levels.

The report also seeks to agree a set of principles for setting fees and charges for Council services in 2024/25.

Background

Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council's ("the Council") net revenue budget requirement for 2023/24 totals £361m 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 2024/25 revenue budget. A separate report, setting out the proposed Council capital programme for 2024/25 to 2027/28, is also presented for members' approval at today's meeting.

Executive Summary

On the 20th December 2023, Cabinet approved a public consultation process on the draft budget for 2024/25.

The draft budget consulted upon included new cost pressures of £30.5m to be funded from: an estimated Revenue Support Grant of 3.1% (£8.6m) from Welsh Government; the use of £6.8m of specific reserves and a range of expenditure and income measures totalling £8.1m. The report modelled council tax at 5% (£4.2m) but identified that a budget gap of £2.7m remained to be found and that further work to close the budget gap was ongoing.

On 20th December 2023, the Welsh Government published their Provisional Local Government Settlement. In setting out the Welsh Government's Proposals, Rebecca Evans, MS, Finance and Local Government Minister acknowledged that this was the most difficult budget since devolution. The Provisional Settlement proposed a 2.8% uplift in Revenue Support Grant for Neath Port Talbot Council - £650k less than what was included in the draft budget proposals and below the average for Wales. Furthermore, the Welsh Government proposed to reduce a number of specific grants. In developing the draft Settlement, Welsh Government assumed that Council Tax would need to rise by 6.8% across Wales in 2024-25 to fund services.

The impact of the Provisional Local Government Settlement was reported to the Cabinet on 22nd January 2024. In addition, members were advised that the Chief Fire Officer had advised that the Mid and West Wales Fire and Rescue Authority was to increase the fire service levy by 9.4% - at the top end of the range previously discussed with Council. This added a further £134k pressure for 2024/25, increasing the overall budget gap from £2.7m to £3.5m.

On 7th February 2024, the Minister for Finance and Local Government advised that an additional £25m for councils across Wales was being made available in 2024/25. This funding stemmed from additional funding being made available to councils in England, largely to respond to pressures in social care. Part of the £25m is to be used to reverse the proposed cut to the specific grant for Social Care Workforce Development announced on 20th December 2023. The balance of £14.4m would be distributed via the Final Local Government Settlement with the NPT share of that expected to be £674k, making the total

expected Final Revenue Settlement increase for NPT to 3% over the 2023/24 revenue budget.

Work has continued since the public consultation on the draft budget proposals was launched on 20th December 2023. Additional budget measures have been identified which reduces the budget gap further. Additionally, as a result of feedback from residents received during the budget consultation and in the separate consultation on street lighting proposals, a small number of budget proposals have been amended. No recommendations were received from the various scrutiny committees on the draft proposals.

The changes since the draft budget proposal was considered by Cabinet on 20th December 2023 are summarised as follows:

	£'000s
Budget gap at 20 th December 2023	2,724
Add back assumed council tax at 5% included in draft budget proposals	+4,233
Total budget gap at December 2023	6,957
Funding shortfall announced as part of Provisional Local Government Settlement	+650
Funding adjustment announced on 7 th February by Welsh Government	-674
Increase in Fire and Rescue Service Levy	+134
Further reduction in energy base budget	-650
Reduction in savings attached to street lighting proposals	+80
Reduction savings attached to canal license	+35
Phasing of savings attached to school cleaning cost recovery	+150
Other adjustments	+43
Revised budget gap 2024/25	6,725

Consequently, to achieve a balanced budget for 2024/25 a Council Tax is now proposed as follows:

Fire and Rescue Service Levy	1.24%
Celtic Leisure operating costs	2.00%
Contribution to Council services	4.66%

Total Council Tax increase 7.90%

Overall, the budget proposals protect service levels and jobs, maintaining stability across the Council at a time when there is considerable volatility and uncertainty in the external operating environment. The proposals recognise that demand across the Council remains at a very high level as a result of:

- More people seeking help and support following the pandemic period, many with more complex needs, particularly in housing, social services and education; and
- Levels of investment interest with a number of significant planning applications and prospective developments happening in the same broad time frame.

We are continuing to experience challenges in recruiting and retaining our workforce, in common with many other parts of public service across Wales. Providing a stable and supportive work environment is crucial to being able to sustain a workforce that will enable the Council to deliver its objectives. These proposals protect jobs to a significant extent.

The proposals also seek creative and innovative solutions to service delivery, recognising that future budgets may also be challenging. Responding to the needs of our communities in different ways is a key feature of the budget proposals with a number of invest to save proposals designed to bring about more sustainable models of service over the medium term. Early priority has been given to housing, social services and the leisure and culture portfolios. This approach will be further developed when the Medium Term Financial Plan is updated.

The Cost of Living Crisis continues to impact across communities. The budget seeks to limit the impact on Council Tax levels, however, the Revenue Support Grant the Council will receive from Welsh Government falls considerably short of what we estimate we need to spend.

The Welsh Government has assumed a minimum council tax increase of 6.8% in its own modelling and members have previously agreed that council tax would need to rise to meet the increased costs of Celtic Leisure Ltd which is a 2% call on the 2024/25 budget. The increased levy applied by the Mid and West Wales Fire Service is a further call on council tax of 1.24%. As a result of the intensive work done through the budget process, it is possible to limit the council tax increase at 7.9%

and without the significant cuts to jobs and services that are being seen in many parts of Wales.

A high level summary of what the proposed budget will deliver in service terms is set out below:

Education, Leisure and Lifelong Learning (ELLL) and Schools

This budget provides an investment of £106.458 million into the delegated schools budget and £33.125 million into the ELLL Directorate. This represents an increase of 4.3% for Schools and 4.6% for ELLL compared to the 2023/24 original budget. The investment will be used to:

- Provide education services to circa 22,000 children and young people;
- Increase planned places for children with additional needs; and
- Make additional investment into Celtic Leisure Services Ltd, subsidising the costs of operating the indoor leisure facilities operated by the company.

As well as the increase to the base budget, the budget proposals provide one-off funding of £1.8m from reserves to:

- Respond to pressures in Home to School Transport; and
- Provide further help to secondary schools to increase attendance and reduce exclusions.

Social Services, Housing and Community Safety

The budget proposals provide investment of £113.699 million for the Social Services, Housing and Community Safety Directorate, an increase of £8.127 million compared with 2023/24 (7.7%). The investment will be used to:

- Support approximately 2,400 vulnerable Children and their families; over 2,500 adults who need care; and support and over 2,500 people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homelessness.
- Increase the number of placements available for those with complex needs;

- Maintain a stable workforce in social care;
- Build capacity in Housing to deliver on the ambitious programme approved by Cabinet Board earlier this year to prevent more people from becoming homeless and reducing the time people need to spend in temporary and emergency accommodation.

Environment and Regeneration

The budget provides £46.515 million for the Environment and Regeneration Directorate, which amounts to an increase of £0.253m or 0.5%. The investment:

- Enables the continuation of the Catch Up, Clean Up, Green Up programme initiated in 2023/24;
- Enables the delivery of the waste management strategy, but does not assume a move to three weekly residual waste collection in 2024/25;
- Creates additional capacity to take forward work on decarbonisation with an early focus on the next phases of work to reduce energy consumption, increase energy efficiency and move to renewable energy sources. The increased capacity will also enable the Council to bring forward a strengthened plan to respond to the climate emergency;
- Protects capacity across the regulatory, regeneration and transport divisions to maintain momentum in delivering on infrastructure and economic development programmes

Finance / Strategy and Corporate Services

The budget provides £21.366 million for the Finance Division and Strategy and Corporate Services Directorate, practically a standstill position when compared with 2023/24. The investment:

- Maintains capacity to ensure good governance of the Council;
- Enables the Council to take forward the next phases of the Future of Work and Digital, Data and Technology strategies to develop the capabilities needed to sustain the Council into the future;
- Delivery of key projects within the Digital Transformation pipeline to support and improve services across the Authority.
- Strengthen the Authority's approach on procurement

The remainder of this report now sets out the detail of the final revenue budget proposals for 2024/25 for consideration by the Cabinet.

Strategic Context

The report considered by the Cabinet on 20th December 2023 set out the context for preparing the 2024/25 revenue budget. Extracts of that report are repeated here for ease of reference.

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 in excess of £100m 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.

2023/24 has proved to be a period characterised by challenges on several fronts, including:

- The economic shock that arose from the illegal war waged by the Russian Government on Ukraine with its associated energy and general inflation impacts;
- Exceptional workload demands arising from the legacy of the Covid-19 pandemic;
- Additional workload demands arising from the Cost of Living crisis;
- Pay awards agreed in excess of funds made available from the governments;
- Continuing supply chain disruption arising from Covid-19 and the wider impacts of BREXIT;
- Structural changes in the labour market creating recruitment and retention challenges across many occupational groups;
- A substantial programme of policy initiatives arising from the Labour-Plaid Cymru Co-operation Agreement;
- Local policy initiatives prioritised by the Council; and
- Significant new investor interest.

The budget agreed for 2023/24, following consultation, provided for an **increase** in unavoidable costs of **£42,189 million** (unfunded pay awards

from 2022-23; pay awards and inflation in 2023/24; and unavoidable pressures). This was funded by £14,352 million net savings across the revenue budget; the use of £3.5 million general reserves; the use of £1.4 million from the leisure specific reserve; an increase in council tax of 4.5% (which in part provided for an increase in the Mid and West Wales Fire and Rescue Authority levy equivalent to 1.8% on council tax); and an increase in the council tax collection rate).

In proposing the budget strategy for 2023/24, members of council were advised by the Council's Chief Finance Officer that a number of significant risks would need to also be managed in-year.

The Chief Finance Officer also noted that the prospects over the medium term were challenging, estimating a further £48 million pressures over the four year period 2024-28. A number of areas for review were highlighted in the budget report to inform the development of the budget strategy for future years, including:

- Further work to review the Council's accommodation portfolio, delivered in phases;
- Work to reduce energy consumption, improve energy efficiency and to accelerate the move to renewable energy sources;
- A review of the Council's fleet and wider transport arrangements;
- A series of reviews to examine external commissioning and procurement spend;
- Further re-basing of the Council budget to reflect changes to the operating model;
- Re-modelling of statutory services to meet the needs of our population differently and at lower cost;
- Work to re-model discretionary services with a focus on alternative income and efficiency;
- Further automation of services and functions; and
- Consideration of increased council tax rates for empty properties and second properties

The work highlighted above has been progressed throughout this financial year. Additionally, officers have reviewed all of the budget ideas submitted as part of the 2023-24 public consultation exercise and which were noted in the final budget report.

Service Pressures

In terms of service pressures, the most recent data suggests that demands in many areas of the Council continue to be at increased volume and in many instances increased complexity. This picture was outlined in a report entitled 'Outlook' presented to the Cabinet in September 2023. Relevant extracts from that report are also identified below for context and updated where appropriate:

Homelessness- the number of people in temporary accommodation has increased from 313 people in 2019-20 to 832 in 2023-24. Without intervention, it is estimated that this will continue to increase to around 2,233 people in 2027-28. In cost terms this would see an increase from £2.6 million in 2023-24 to £4.4 million in 2027-28. Demand is being driven by a number of factors:

- Policy change from Welsh Government which has not been fully funded but has lowered the threshold for qualifying for support from councils;
- Family pressures arising from the cost of living crisis;
- A reduction in affordable accommodation in the private rented sector;
- Insufficient accommodation due to market factors, particularly one-bedded accommodation; and
- An increase in care leavers and youth homelessness.

Children's Social Services – at the beginning of January 2023 there were 1,272 children and young people receiving some level of support from the Council. Contacts to the service were 2,209 in that month, compared with 1,435 in April 2021. Pressures are being experienced in relation to the complexity of need being presented to the service also. The number of children and young people requiring a high cost residential placement is circa 20 – double the number we would have experienced prior to the outbreak of Covid-19 and there are also a growing number of unaccompanied child asylum seekers being allocated by the UK Government who require support. This situation is compounded by the lack of suitable placements, further impacted by the Welsh Government's policy to eliminate profit from the care market. Ensuring a stable workforce will need to remain a priority focus throughout the period with the need to ensure remuneration and our

wider employer offer remains attractive in a highly competitive labour market.

Adult Social Services – new contacts to the service were 9,265 in 2022-23 compared with 6,259 in 2018-19. Demand is projected to continue to rise given that the population is ageing and in particular, the number of people living with dementia is expected to double within 20 years. Covid-19 has had a major impact on the care market with a large number of providers withdrawing from the market entirely. The cost of providing care has also increased significantly, linked to the Welsh Government's policy to provide at least the Real Living Wage and the impact of enhanced infection control regimes. The number of people with disabilities requiring a specialist residential placement has seen a sharp increase linked to Covid-19. The number of people accessing health service continues at a very high level, placing additional pressure on social services to ensure care packages are available for those who need them, to expedite hospital discharge.

Education – Covid-19 and the policies implemented to protect the NHS and save lives has had a significant impact on children and young people. Many children and young people have experienced anxiety returning to school and have struggled with social isolation with adverse impacts on their emotional wellbeing. The cost of living crisis is compounding this and there are increased waiting times for key partner services.

Attendance rates, whilst seeing some improvement, are below rates that were achieved prior to the pandemic and it is of considerable concern that fixed term and permanent exclusions have increased across secondary schools. Welsh Government's additional learning needs legislation has placed significant pressures on all schools for which there has been no additional funding. Furthermore, the increase in the number of young people who have been identified with additional learning needs is placing intolerable pressure on budgets as schools struggle to meet their statutory duties in respect of these young people. Home to school transport is a further pressure requiring attention with more children and young people requesting transport and prices increasing well above budget.

Leisure and Culture – participation levels have now recovered to pre-pandemic levels however given the significant pressures across statutory services and functions, there is greater pressure to reduce deficits and subsidies further.

Planning and Public Protection Services – Public protection services were particularly impacted by Covid-19 and although recovering steadily, continue to address backlogs of inspection activity following the need to refocus the services to support public health policy throughout the pandemic period. Alongside inspection backlogs, contacts to the service have been unusually volatile and often complex.

Since the beginning of 2020 the service has experienced the loss of over 50% of its staff many of which were long standing experienced officers. There has been significant difficulty in replacing these members of staff and whilst positive progress is now being made, it will take some time to ensure that those staff have the relevant experience to fully support developer interest. In addition to staff turnover, the planning service experienced a high volume of applications but has recovered well. It is however, continuing to experience an unusual level of very complex large applications, including the Global Centre for Rail Excellence and Wildfox Resort Afan Valley, together with major projects associated with the opportunities around the Freeport and our Swansea Bay City Deal projects.

NPT is also still the focus of investment for major renewable energy projects which whilst determined by the Planning Environment Decisions Wales (PEDW), require a huge amount of officer time. During this time, the Council has also progressed the review of the Local Development Plan within statutory timescales. All of this combining to place a continuing pressure which is set to increase further following the announcement that an Electric Arc Furnace is to be constructed at Tata Steel UK's Port Talbot site.

Streetcare - A revised Waste Management Strategy/Action Plan was developed in the current financial year to position the Council to achieve the next recycling target of 70% by 2024-25. This requires considerable change within the service if we are to avoid financial penalties. Residents' expectations of standards for the public domain, despite additional investment, exceed the capacity of the service and therefore continues to provide an ongoing challenge. The service continues to proactively draw down grant funding to address drainage and highways maintenance with some good impacts. However, the deteriorating age and condition of infrastructure, coupled with the impacts of climate change presents an ongoing challenge.

Property and Regeneration – additional grant funding through Levelling Up and Shared Prosperity Funds have been very welcome but are challenging given the tight timescales for delivery. This work runs alongside the Innovation and Local Carbon Growth and the Homes as Power Stations programmes now in delivery as part of the Swansea Bay City Deal and the Celtic Freeport secured in February 2023 following a Freeport Competition launched by the UK and Welsh Governments.

The recent announcement by Tata and the UK Government will add to workloads and are being accommodated within a considerably expanded capital programme that is also delivering improvements across the school estate; enhancements to child care provision; community regeneration projects; and delivering a rationalisation of office and depot accommodation.

The priority being given to decarbonisation and climate change at all levels of policy making, together with the energy crisis, is also placing pressure on our energy function, requiring action at strategic and tactical levels.

All of the above come at a time when the service is experiencing recruitment and retention challenges because of structural changes in the labour market.

Transport and Engineering

The service will need to continue to manage the introduction of the 20mph default limit introduced by Welsh Government and changes to the funding of the bus network. Both of these areas are impacting significantly on local residents.

Car parking income remains well below pre-pandemic levels requiring a review of parking infrastructure and fees.

Good progress is being made with a number of major and minor highways projects and increased capacity within the service will help increase the amount of funding secured to support the development of active travel routes across the county borough. Managing the legacy infrastructure of the Council will continue to be a challenge given the limits on funding available to the Council with most grant income available to support new infrastructure development and limited scope to bring in additional income to address legacy infrastructure. Maintaining

the existing infrastructure is also a challenge given its age profile and the escalating cost of materials and contractors.

Corporate Services and Governance Systems – the summary of pressures identified above combine to place ongoing pressure on corporate services and governance systems to adapt and facilitate the change needed. Further work will need to continue in 2024-25 to fully restore governance systems as we move beyond Covid-19 recovery. Our Corporate Performance Management Framework will need to be strengthened whilst our Strategic Equalities Plan, our climate change and nature emergency frameworks; as well as new legislation such as the Social Partnership Duties will also need attention.

2024/25 Estimated Budget Gap

The table on page 14 and 15 shows the estimated amount of funding needed to run council services in 2024/25 and the funding available.

In setting its budget for 2023/24, Council agreed to utilise £3.5m from general reserves. When considering the position for 2024/25 this £3.5m represents a 'gap' which needs to be made good. In addition to the above the Council is facing pay and inflationary increases for 2024/25 totalling c£15m.

There are unavoidable service pressures which will also increase the estimated cost of running council services by £4.7m as detailed in Appendix 3.

When setting the 2023/24 budget, Council agreed a number of 'pressures to be monitored' that were not built into the base budget. Of these, it is now apparent that in the Social Services, Health and Housing Directorate £6.8m of these 'pressures to be monitored' have become annual recurring costs pressures, largely as a result of more people needing care and support and more people presenting with complex needs with attendant high cost care and support packages. It is noted that unlike previous years, Social Services has not been able to access winter pressure funding or end of year funding to alleviate these pressures and the cost now falls to the revenue base budget.

The scale of the pressures within the Social Services system is such that a multi-year solution will need to be established. This will require additional, recurring revenue funding for the adult social services

budgets over a number of years, along with an invest to save programme of service change designed to reduce demand coming into the system and to meet care needs at lower cost in more appropriate settings. In order to allow for the implementation of longer term cost saving measures it is proposed that £6m of pressures be funded in 2024/25 from specific reserves with permanent funding and service changes identified for the 2025/26 financial year onwards. Investing more resources in adult social care will clearly have direct implications for opportunities to fund other council services. Strong representations have been made through the Welsh Local Government Association and the various professional networks to Welsh Government to increase funding allocated to social services. It is disappointing to see that the planned investment in the NHS is not being matched by investment in the social care system.

The Provisional Local Government Settlement received on 20th December 2023 provided an increase in funding of 2.8% or £7.709m; lower than the 3.1% previously indicated by Welsh Government.

Subsequent to the provisional settlement being published, the Council has received notification that an additional £14.4m (across Wales) will be included within the final settlement. We have been advised that our share of the £14.4m will be c£674k. This additional funding has been allocated in full to help mitigate the pressures within the adult social care budget although it is clearly considerably short of what is required.

2024/25 Budget gap summary

	£'000
Use of general reserves to fund 2023/24 budget	3,500
Inflation and pay awards	14,278
Increase in fire service level - equivalent to 1.24% increase in council tax	877
Unavoidable pressure – cost of running indoor leisure – equivalent to 2% increase in council tax (appendix 3)	1,400
Other unavoidable pressures (appendix 3)	3,300
Social Services and Homelessness pressures to be monitored - now recurring costs (appendix 4)	6,800
Total cost pressures to be funded	30,155

Funding available	
Welsh Government Revenue Support Grant – updated for final settlement estimate	-8,602
Specific reserves	-6,000
Total funding available	-14,602
Budget gap to be funded from savings/income generation or council tax	15,553

Strategy for closing the budget gap

Since it became apparent that the financial outlook had deteriorated significantly, 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, residents, businesses and other interested stakeholders.

The starting point in relation to the 2024/25 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. However, despite this work there remains a structural pressure requiring a permanent solution which needs to be addressed as part of the budget strategy detailed below.

The budget strategy for 2024/25 is based on the following key objectives:

Maintaining a clear focus on recovery from Covid-19 and pressures arising from the Cost of Living Crisis

There are exceptional pressures across the Council as the impact of policies pursued during the Covid-19 response period emerge, compounded by the continuing cost of living crisis. 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. The budget strategy makes proposals for a number of spend to save initiatives designed to reduce demand for service and to secure lower cost solutions whilst still maintaining focus on enabling positive outcomes to be achieved for people in need of support. The changes proposed are crucial to avoid more cases escalating to a point of crisis when much more expensive solutions would need to be found.

Good progress has been made in the Environment Directorate to recover from the impact of Covid-19, however, some backlogs of work and pent up demand remain. The budget strategy recognises the need for continued support to fully recover whilst also recognising the need to achieve the next recycling target of 70%; ensure the public realm is sufficiently maintained; and that infrastructure across the county borough is accessible and safe.

It is noted from the budget consultation exercise that many residents are unaware of the ongoing and significant impacts of the pandemic on council services and associated costs. Work will be developed to address this as part of the revision of the Corporate Plan.

Facilitating and Enabling Economic Growth

There has been a mixed impact across the local economy as the pandemic and cost of living crisis have taken their course.

We are dealing with a growing portfolio of major economic development initiatives. The Council has been successful in its bid, along with partners, to establish a Freeport covering the port of Port Talbot and the Port of Milford Haven which should 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.

There is also 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 £29 million investment programme over the remainder of this financial year and the next financial year through the Shared Prosperity Fund; the City Deal programme continues which amounts to an investment of £73.5m; together with the potential to draw down significant capital funds to support innovation and housing developments.

The Council has also been successful with three levelling up fund (LUF) bids. The most recent of these being announced in November 2023, namely, £14m for the transformation of the Princess Royal Theatre and Public Realm within Port Talbot Town Centre and £13m for the Newbridge Road Bridge project.

The investment in an Electric Arc Furnace for the Tata site in Port Talbot will also require attention from the Council in its role as the local planning authority and its business support team will also be supporting those affected by the Tata transition.

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. As will be seen in the consultation responses summarised later in this report, growing the number of jobs in the economy is an issue that residents believe should be a continuing priority for the Council.

Delivering local and Welsh Government policy priorities

We are in the third year of the current Senedd term and in the second year of the local government term. The Welsh Government has set out an extensive programme of policy commitments that will impact on councils. It is essential that any new policies are fully funded and that the capacity of local government to make changes in the current climate is properly understood. The Council 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 May 2024.

The budget consultation responses encouraged a focus on pursuing local policies as a priority over implementing Welsh Government policy priorities. It is clear that the recently introduced policy on 20mph is not popular amongst many who responded to the survey and this has also coloured people's views on the priorities of Welsh Government more broadly.

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.

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.

Ensuring the council is sustainable was also seen as important by residents who elected to respond to the budget consultation.

Savings and income generation

Over the course of the summer, autumn and winter periods, officers have been working to identify a range of savings and income generation

measures that can contribute to closing the budget gap detailed earlier in this report.

Income

- The strategies proposed in appendix 5 show a clear focus on maximising income generation, especially across the leisure portfolio. The proposals include challenging but realistic targets which can be achieved by further developing commercial approaches.
- In relation to fees and charges, the budget assumptions include a general uplift of 7.5% in total income receipts, arising from a combination of variations in price and activity. The 7.5% is a planning assumption. Corporate Directors, in line with delegated powers, will seek to maximise income through fees and charges as appropriate, responding to market conditions and being agile in relation to fees and charges. They will also address one of the issues raised as part of the 2023/24 budget consultation where members requested the following:

‘Pricing of services – optimise this to accommodate different levels of service’

- Drawing down new funding through relevant programmes. Earlier in this report the range of regeneration programmes that are being progressed was referenced. Officers have already been successful in attracting significant funding to support the Council’s heritage and culture aspirations. Where possible the Council will seek to recover the full cost of its involvement in specific programmes.

Savings

In relation to accommodation and energy, a number of initiatives are underway including:

- Reducing the council’s accommodation portfolio by selling and repurposing buildings thus reducing the associated operational costs;
- A number of tactical proposals have been included in the budget strategy for 2024/25 that will reduce the footprint needed for council operations. This includes releasing office space at Tregelles Court; and changed uses of the Annexe at Neath, the Quays and Port Talbot Civic Centre;

- Options for reducing the number of large office buildings in the portfolio are also being assessed. Proposals will be brought forward in 2024/25, linked to the regeneration plans for the county borough;
- Assisting building managers to reduce energy consumption by ensuring that building management systems are optimised where possible thereby reducing energy consumption;
- Installing energy efficiency measures, such as more efficient lighting in the Neath Civic Centre and the Quays; and
- Targeting a programme of renewable energy solutions and energy efficiency measures across the estate on a prioritised basis. The energy team is being expanded on an invest-to-save basis to deliver the improvements available to the Council at greater pace.

Officers have undertaken a further detailed examination of expenditure and identified further opportunities to drive down costs by improving the economy and efficiency of the organisation. Every directorate has been charged with finding 2% savings on top of other budget measures. The aim has been throughout to protect jobs and services to the maximum extent possible.

As a result of the consultation feedback there are a number of changes to the originally proposed savings/income generation strategies contained within this final report. These are:

Street lighting

The proposal to switch off some street lighting columns at night has been withdrawn from the proposals. Further consideration of the proposal to switch off lighting columns will be undertaken in 2024-25, in particular, to address fear of crime concerns raised by residents.

Termination of Neath Canal public access rights agreement

This proposal has been withdrawn as the legal process will take longer than initially advised.

Full cost recovery of primary school cleaning

This proposal is now being phased over a three year period to mitigate the impact on schools.

A number of additional savings have been identified in order to close the budget gap. Appendix 5 details the savings and income generation proposals with the updated budget gap shown below:

2024/25 Budget gap summary – after savings / income

	£'000
Budget gap to be funded from savings/income generation or council tax	15,553
Savings identified	-6,627
Income generation proposals identified	-2,201
Total savings / income generation	-8,828
Remaining budget gap to be funded from council tax	6,725

Reserves position

The Council agreed a general reserves policy which states that the general reserve balance should be kept at 4% of the net revenue budget. The 2023/24 net revenue budget is currently £361m meaning that the general reserve should be held at c£14.4m. If these budget proposals are approved the 2024/25 net revenue budget will be £376m, meaning that a 4% general reserve balance would need to be £15m.

The latest budget monitoring report to December 2023 includes a projection that as at 31st March 2024 the balance on the general reserve will be £15.5m; the same reported also noted an in year overspend of £0.5m. If the in-year position doesn't improve by the end of the financial year, the general reserve balance reduces to £15m at the 4% advised level. As a result of this, the Chief Finance Officer's view is that there is no scope to use the general reserve to help balance the 2024/25 budget.

In addition, Members are reminded that £6m of specific reserves are being used to fund recurring costs in Social Services while longer term interventions are developed.

Proposals for council tax in 2024/25

Under the Local Government Finance Act 1992 Council is required to set a balanced budget with regard to the advice of the Chief Finance Officer (Section 151).

The Welsh Government settlement assumes that all Councils in Wales will increase council tax by 6.8%.

In addition the 2023/24 budget proposals included a two year funding strategy for indoor leisure services. This strategy set out the need to increase council tax by 4% phased over a two year period. 2024/25 is the second year of that period therefore an increase of equivalent to 2% is required.

The Mid and West Wales Fire and rescue Authority has determined to levy an increase of 9.4%. This is equivalent to a council tax increase of 1.24%

These budget proposals include a recommendation that council tax increases by 7.9% in 2024/25. Council tax at Band D for 2024/25 would be £1,871.76.

Details of the increases by property band are shown below:

Band	Chargeable Dwellings	% in Band	Cumulative %	Current (2023/24) £	2024/25 new rate with an increase of 7.90%	Annual Increase £	Monthly Increase (12) £	Weekly Increase £
A	13,344	20.63%	20.63%	1,156.48	1,247.84	91.36	7.61	1.76
B	26,416	40.83%	61.46%	1,349.23	1,455.81	106.58	8.88	2.05
C	11,387	17.60%	79.06%	1,541.97	1,663.79	121.82	10.15	2.34
D	7,195	11.12%	90.19%	1,734.72	1,871.76	137.04	11.42	2.64
E	4,358	6.74%	96.92%	2,120.21	2,287.71	167.50	13.96	3.22
F	1,353	2.09%	99.01%	2,505.71	2,703.65	197.94	16.50	3.81
G	529	0.82%	99.83%	2,891.20	3,119.60	228.40	19.03	4.39
H	95	0.15%	99.98%	3,469.44	3,743.52	274.08	22.84	5.27
I	14	0.02%	100.00%	4,047.68	4,367.44	319.76	26.65	6.15

Due to the relative number of properties in bands A-C these proposals represent an **average** increase in council tax of £2.25 per week.

The Council Tax Reduction Scheme (CTRS) provides council tax support to approximately 15,500 households within the County Borough, of which approximately 10,850 receive full support and pay no Council Tax. The remaining 4,650 households receive partial support to pay for their Council Tax.

Medium term financial outlook

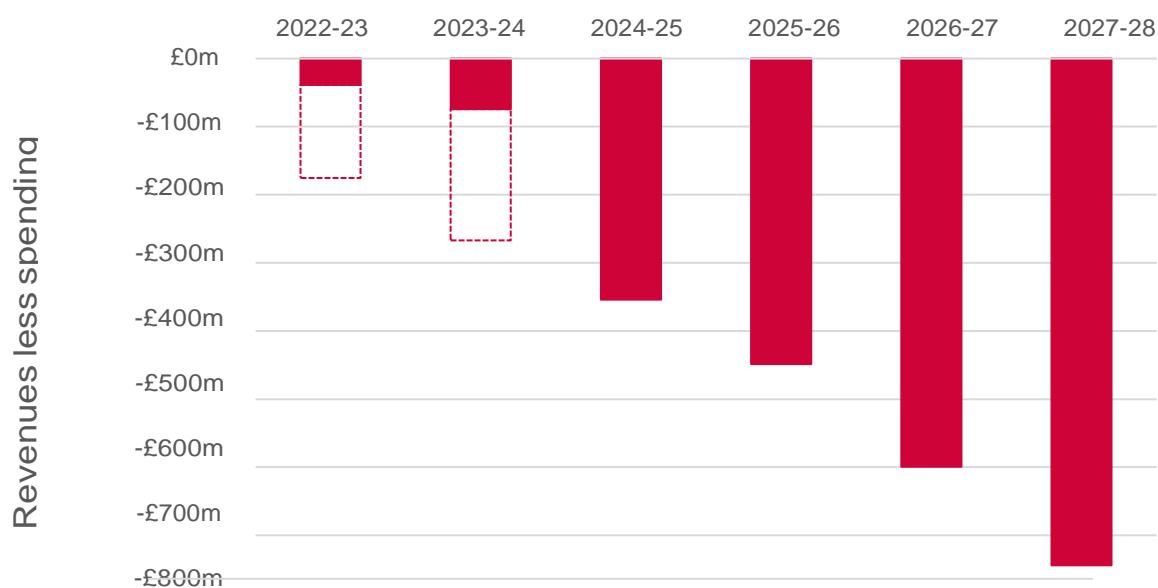
The current medium term financial outlook for local authorities in Wales is challenging to say the least. The Welsh Government have recently indicated that the local government settlement for 2025/26 is likely to be ‘cash flat’ at best.

The latest outlook from the Wales Fiscal Analysis team includes the following observation:

‘local authority finances appear to be on an unsustainable path, with the funding gap growing in each year of the projection’

The outlook details a funding gap across Wales of £744m by 2027/28 as set out in the graph below:

Local authorities’ projected ‘funding gap’ relative to 2021-22 baseline



Revenues less spending Budgeted appropriations from reserves
Source: Wales Fiscal Analysis calculations. ●

In terms of the Council’s Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) we are currently forecasting a budget gap of c£48m by 2028/29. This increase is a mix of pay/inflation, service pressures and demographic demand. Since the MTFP was prepared the Welsh Government have provided forecasts which

are far worse than previously modelled which will increase this gap significantly.

Once the 2024/25 budget has been agreed officers will commence the process of revisiting the assumptions in the MTFP and start once again in earnest on budget proposals for 2025/26 and beyond

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”.

Where there are specific proposals which will impact on crime and disorder, these have been subject to separate public consultation and integrated impact assessments.

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.

An integrated impact assessment (IIA) is appended to this report and this provides further detail. The main conclusion from the IIA is that:

‘The budget seeks to:

- *Enable the Council to continue to deliver its Corporate Plan*
- *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.'

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 and chief officers have worked closely with the trade unions throughout the budget process to identify savings and income proposals and to lobby both UK and Welsh Governments to prioritise local government within their spending decisions. Staff have also been encouraged 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

A number of pre-consultation engagement activities took place:

- Pre-consultation public engagement roadshows took place in December 2023 in Aberafan Shopping Centre, Cymer Library, Neath Leisure Centre and Pontardawe Heritage Centre. The purpose was to help explain the context in which the 2024-25 budget is being set and to encourage people to respond to the forthcoming consultation.
- Staff Council – 28 November 2023
- Voluntary Sector Liaison Forum – 13 November 2023

The Cabinet authorised a period of public consultation on 20 December 2023. The consultation started on 20 December 2023 and closed on 10 January 2024. 556 people participated in the public consultation exercise and the feedback received has been carefully considered to further develop the budget options. In addition to the questionnaire responses, six written responses were also received.

Activities during the consultation period 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 Wednesday 20 December 2023 (following Cabinet's approval) until midnight on Wednesday 10 January 2024.
- Offline – paper questionnaires, explainer leaflets, reference copies of the cabinet report dated 20 December 2023 and feedback boxes for completed questionnaires were made available in 35 public facilities across the county borough. These included Civic Centres, council run and community libraries, and Celtic Leisure venues amongst others. All documents were made available in Welsh and English. 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 (3 meetings at the Service Response Centre and 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.
- Email – the email address LetsTalk@npt.gov.uk was used for people who wanted to respond via this mechanism.
- Stakeholder consultation – this included 4 scrutiny committees, and the Town and Community Councils Liaison Forum.

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/LetsKeepTalking
 - on the consultation pages www.npt.gov.uk/consultations
- Adverts/posters on TV screens in the Neath and Port Talbot Bus Stations and Neath Train Station.
- Posters, printed questionnaires, an explainer leaflet and feedback boxes at public venues including libraries, Celtic Leisure venues, civic centres and other public buildings.
- The council’s corporate social media accounts. At the start and towards the end of the consultation period, NPT Council Elected Members were sent an email asking those who had their own social media accounts to share the council’s posts.
- Press coverage generated by cabinet reports and press releases.
- NPT News – the council’s e-newsletter (edition 68: 21 December 2023)
- Email
 - NPT Council Elected Members, Voluntary Sector representative and Community Councils were notified that the consultation had started and signposted to further details. Face to face briefings were also held for voluntary sector representatives and town and community council representatives.
 - NPT Citizens’ Panel – an email announcing the start of the consultation and inviting panel members to respond was circulated on 21 December 2023, with a reminder follow up on 5 January 2024.

- Internal communications channels (staff notice boards, staff newsletter, intranet, Viva Engage)

Every scrutiny committee also met during the consultation period to review the budget proposals and to offer comment to the Cabinet. No recommendations emerged from the scrutiny process.

The budget consultation exercise conducted was additional to a number of separate consultation exercises that have been carried out on specific proposals that are included within the budget strategy. These include:

- Public consultation on proposals to trim, dim or part switch off street lighting was authorised on 14th November 2023 at the Environment, Regeneration and Streetscene Cabinet Board. The outcome of public consultation will be reported back to the Cabinet Board in March 2024. Budget proposals contained in this report have been reduced as a consequence of the feedback received from consultation and no longer include proposals for part switching off of street lights in 2024/25.
- The outcome of a 90 day public consultation that commenced on July 13th 2023 on the proposed housing and homelessness strategic plan was report to the Social Services, Housing and Community Safety Cabinet Board on January 25th 2024. Eleven consultation events were held to solicit stakeholder feedback on proposals. The NPT Council for Voluntary Services also provided a written response highlighting feedback from a range of voluntary sector organisations.
- The Social Services, Housing and Community Safety Cabinet Board also considered the outcome of a 60 day consultation carried out on a draft adult social care strategy at its meeting on January 25th 2024.

Additionally, to test public opinion at the formative stage of the budget process, the 'Let's keep talking' campaign ran over the summer of 2024.

A summary of the consultation responses is included within Appendix 8 of this report.

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 1.5% 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 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 2024/25. The following is not an exhaustive list but represents the most significant at this stage:

- Energy costs – Energy costs increased significantly during 2023/24 however it is envisaged that these will reduce by 2024/25. If this is not the case there is a risk that schools and other high energy consuming services will need to take action to manage any overspend position.
- 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 4% (2.5% plus 1.5% contingency) included in the budget . 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.
- Demand for services may increase.
- The ongoing war in Ukraine and wider geopolitical environment 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
- 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.
- As a consequence of increases in demand there is a risk that the investment proposals being delivered across Social Services and Housing do not deliver the reductions in base budgets required. In addition to the invest to save proposals a range of other strategies will be developed to sustain service delivery without significant disruption to other council services. Whilst this is achievable in the short term, it is unlikely that this will be a sustainable position over the medium term without significant additional government investment.

The tables included in appendix 5 of this report provide additional information regarding the risk/impact of each savings proposal.

Recommendation

It is recommended that Cabinet 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 2024/25 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 Cabinet 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 2024/25

-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 2024/25

-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 the setting of Council Tax levels for 2024/25 Cabinet are asked to commend to Council that:

- Council Tax in 2024/25 will increase by 7.9%. The 2024/25 Band D equivalent for Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council will be £1,871.76

Reason for Proposed Decision

To fulfil the statutory requirement to determine the budget for 2024/25.

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 2024/25

Appendix 2 - Inflation assumptions

Appendix 3 - Unavoidable service pressures

Appendix 4 - Pressures to be monitored

Appendix 5 – 2024/25 savings / income generation proposals

Appendix 6 – 2025/26 – 2028/29 savings and income generation proposals

Appendix 7 - Schedule of reserves

Appendix 8 - Summary of consultation responses

Appendix 9 - Integrated Impact Assessment

Background Papers

- Outlook Report – Cabinet, 20th September 2023
- Consultation on changes to street lighting – Environment, Regeneration and Streetscene Cabinet Board, 14th November 2023
- Budget Report – Cabinet, 20th December 2023
- Provisional Local Government Settlement – Update Report – Cabinet 22nd January 2024
- Transformation of Housing and Homelessness Services – Social Services, Housing and Community Safety Cabinet Board, 25th January 2024
- Transformation of Adult Social Care – Social Services, Housing and Community Safety Cabinet Board, 25th January 2024

- 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 – 2024/25 Revenue Budget

Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council 2024/25 Proposed budget and financing			
	2023/24 Original Budget £'000	2024/25 Original Budget £'000	Annual Increase %
Schools	102,086	106,458	4.3%
Education, Leisure and Lifelong Learning	31,677	33,125	4.6%
Social Services, Housing and Community Safety	105,572	113,699	7.7%
Environment	46,262	46,515	0.5%
Finance / Strategy and Corporate Services	21,357	21,366	0.0%
	306,953	321,163	
Levies			
Swansea Port Health Authority	46	46	
Corporate Joint Committee Levy	127	127	
Fire Authority	9,923	10,799	
Fire Authority - pension grant		-230	
Margam Crematorium	1	1	
	10,097	10,743	
Contributions			
Archive Service	96	106	
Magistrates Court	10	10	
	106	116	
Other Expenditure			
Treasury Management / Capital Financing	19,608	19,603	
Council Tax Support	19,413	20,784	
2022/24 Pay contingency	4,714	-0	
2023/24 Pay contingency - central services		2,238	
2023/24 Pay contingency - schools		1,577	
Contingency	786	375	
Energy efficiency / Transition / Contingency	2,800	0	
	47,321	44,577	
Contribution from General Reserve	-3,500	0	
NET REVENUE BUDGET	360,977	376,599	
Funded by:			
Aggregate External Finance	276,696	285,594	
Discretionary Rate Relief	-387	-389	
Council Tax - Neath Port Talbot	84,668	91,393	
TOTAL FUNDING	360,977	376,599	

Appendix 2 – Inflation assumptions

Expenditure Category	Inflation %
Pay(2.5% & 1.5% contingency)	4.00%
Employee other	4.00%
Energy - gas and electricity	0.00%
NNDR	1.00%
Other premises	2.00%
Home to school transport	5.00%
Other transport	2.00%
Supplies And Services	0.00%
External waste contracts	5.00%
Adult services	7.10%
Childrens services	5.00%
Other payments to third parties	2.00%
Internal Services	2.00%
Transfer Payments	2.00%
Fire Service Levy	9.40%
Council Tax Reduction Scheme	7.90%

Appendix 3 – Unavoidable Service Pressures

Directorate	Detail	£'000 2024/25	£'000 2025/26	£'000 2026/27	£'000 2027/28	£'000 2028/29	£'000 Total
<u>Schools</u>	-						
Schools	Welsh Medium Starter School Neath Abbey	300	350				650
Schools	Address historical shortfall in teaching assistant funding	750	750	750	750	750	3,750
Total Schools		1,050	1,100	750	750	750	4,400
<u>Education, Leisure & Lifelong Learning (ELLL)</u>		£'000 2024/25	£'000 2025/26	£'000 2026/27	£'000 2027/28	£'000 2028/29	£'000 Total
Leisure	Increased cost of operating indoor leisure by Celtic Leisure - phased over two years	1,400					1,400
Leisure	Additional cost of running indoor leisure if insourced		1,300				1,300
Additional learning needs	Increase in planned places for children with additional learning needs	250					250
Total ELLL		1,650	1,300	0	0	0	2,950

Appendix 3 – Unavoidable Service Pressures

		£'000 2024/25	£'000 2025/26	£'000 2026/27	£'000 2027/28	£'000 2028/29	£'000 Total
<u>Environment (ENV)</u>							
Environment	Core fund posts funded from service resilience reserve	500	500				1,000
Environment	Budgets temporarily reduced by £850K over two years to fund staff undertaking work associated with grant income. When the grant ends in 2025/26 the budget needs to be reinstated.			850			850
Total ENV		500	500	850	0	0	1,850
<u>Social Services, Health and Housing (SSHH)</u>							
Adult Services	Actual growth in placements	1,500	5,750	1,500	1,000	1,000	10,750
Housing and Homelessness	Increased cost of provision		1,100				1,100
Total SSHH		1,500	6,850	1,500	1,000	1,000	11,850
Grand total funded unavoidable service pressures		4,700	9,750	3,100	1,750	1,750	21,050

Appendix 4 – Pressures to be monitored

Directorate	Pressure	£'000	Risk if not supported
Social Services, Health and Housing	Market Pay supplement for Social workers	1,000	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, Health and Housing	2023/24 base budget funded from reserves - anticipation that late notification of grants will offset	3,800	Reserves will run out leaving base budget gap
Social Services, Health and Housing	Homelessness	1,100	Failure of statutory duty, people will be forced to live back on the streets)
Social Services, Health and Housing	Residential Care increase in placements	900	Failure of statutory duty
TOTAL		6,800	

Appendix 5 – 2024/25 Savings and income generation proposals

Reference	Lead	Service Area	Description	£'000 2024/25 Total	£'000 2024/25 Saving	£'000 2024/25 Income generation
		<u>Directorate</u>				
		Schools		250	250	0
		Education, Leisure and Lifelong Learning		1,454	570	884
		Environment		1,741	907	834
		Social Services, Health and Housing		2,063	1,788	275
		Corporate Services		610	462	148
		Other / Council wide savings		2,710	2,650	60
		Total		8,828	6,627	2,201
SCH1	<u>Schools</u> Noelwyn Daniel	-	Review of contracting and procurement arrangement has identified scope for significant savings	250	250	
		-				
		Total (Schools)		250	250	0
- ELLL1	<u>Education, Leisure and Lifelong Learning (ELLL)</u> Chris Saunders	- Margam Country Park	Car park changes, orangery improvements, catering improvements, motorhome site, land train and additional catering.	100		100

Appendix 5 – 2024/25 Savings and income generation proposals

Reference	Lead	Service Area	Description	£'000 2024/25 Total	£'000 2024/25 Saving	£'000 2024/25 Income generation
ELLL2	Chris Saunders	Pontardawe Arts Centre	Additional events and catering improvements	40		40
ELLL3	Chris Saunders	Princess Royal Theatre	Additional events and pricing review.	58		58
ELLL4	Chris Saunders	Indoor leisure	Indoor Leisure - trading improvements.	460		460
ELLL5	Chris Saunders	Aberafan Seafront	Seafront - New kiosk run in house	25		25
ELLL6	Chris Saunders	Library Service	Service remodelling	20	20	
ELLL7	Rhiannon Crowhurst	Home to school transport	Externally led review of all existing arrangements	350	350	
ELLL8	Rhiannon Crowhurst	School Meals	Offset Universal Primary Free School Meals (UPFSM) admin grant against core salary costs	70		70
ELLL9	Rhiannon Crowhurst	Primary school cleaning	Full cost recovery - Increase cleaning recharge to schools phased over three years	84		84
ELLL10	Hayley Lervy	Out of County Placements	Remove current contingency within Independent Sector / Out of County Placements budget	200	200	
ELLL11	Chris Millis	Parent, Pupil & Governor Support	Offset Period Dignity admin grant against core salary costs	17		17
ELLL12	Chris Millis	Education, Development & Inclusion Services	Offset Regional Consortia Support Improvement Grant (RCSIG) against core salary costs of Safeguarding Team - education & development	20		20
ELLL13	Chris Millis	Youth Service	Offset youth support grant against core funded post	10		10
	Total (ELLL)			1,454	570	884

Appendix 5 – 2024/25 Savings and income generation proposals

Reference	Lead	Service Area	Description	£'000 2024/25 Total	£'000 2024/25 Saving	£'000 2024/25 Income generation
-	<u>Environment (ENV)</u>	-				
ENV1	Simon Brennan	Accommodation review - phase 2	Further savings from rationalisation of buildings including closure of Tregelles Court office building	96	96	
ENV3	Simon Brennan	Grant maximisation	Maximising the charging of staff time against external grants whilst available	350	350	
ENV4	Simon Brennan	Former Metal Box building	This is a savings target aimed at removing the current operating subsidy of the former Metal Box premises in Neath.	185		185
ENV5	Simon Brennan	Property & Regeneration (Strategic Funding)	City Deal Programme Management - additional income	142		142
ENV6	Simon Brennan	Property & Regeneration (Facilities Management)	Reduce cleaning posts	24	24	
ENV8	Mike Roberts	Street lighting	Reduction in energy costs in relation to street lighting - introduction of dimming and other energy saving measures. Excludes lighting switch off element of consultation.	220	220	
ENV9	Mike Roberts	Streetcare (Waste)	Increase recycle Income following the remodelling of the MRec	400		400
ENV10	Mike Roberts	Streetcare (Waste)	Energy savings at the Mrec	50	50	
ENV11	Mike Roberts	Streetcare (Waste)	Take action to reduce the level of breakages evident in the recycling boxes/bags	25	25	
ENV12	Mike Roberts	Streetcare (Neighbourhood)	Termination of Neath Canal Public Access Rights Agreement on lower section - On hold subject to ongoing legal advice			
ENV13	Mike Roberts	Streetcare (Neighbourhood)	Termination of License Agreement on the upper section of the Neath Canal	100	100	
ENV14	Mike Roberts	Streetcare (Neighbourhood)	Full Cost Recovery for schools grounds maintenance	50		50

Appendix 5 – 2024/25 Savings and income generation proposals

Reference	Lead	Service Area	Description	£'000 2024/25 Total	£'000 2024/25 Saving	£'000 2024/25 Income generation
ENV15	Dave Griffiths	Highways and Engineering (Road Safety)	Learner Travel Wales Measure	7	7	
ENV16	Dave Griffiths	Highways and Engineering (Highways Development Control)	New range of charges for Sustainable Drainage (SAB) pre-application advice	9		9
ENV18	Dave Griffiths	Highways and Engineering (Transport Management)	SLAs with SWTRA and Tai Tarian to be reconsidered with a view to increasing income by 5%. These are not double counted against the fees and charges income target	5		5
ENV19	Dave Griffiths	Highways and Engineering (Engineering Consultancy)	Increase the multiplier to maximise staff costs from the capital programme	20		20
ENV20	Ceri Morris	Planning and Public Protection (General Environmental Health)	Increase income above 7.5% threshold on pest control service (£7k), Japanese Knotweed management service (£4k)	11		11
ENV21	Ceri Morris	Planning and Public Protection (General Environmental Health)	Increase the number of grant applications to WG to secure funding for air quality monitoring	5		5
ENV22	Ceri Morris	Planning and Public Protection (Trading Standards, Food & Health Protection)	General cuts to a variety of budgets including Proceeds of Crimae Act (POCA) costs to be trimmed, less promotion of events, car allowances, transport recharges	11	11	
ENV23	Ceri Morris	Planning and Public Protection (Trading Standards, Food & Health Protection)	Increase in fees and charges above the 7.5% threshold.	2		2
ENV24	Ceri Morris	Planning and Public Protection (Policy, Countryside & Wildlife)	Reduction in use of consultants i.e. reduction in professional fees budget	9	9	
ENV25	Ceri Morris	Planning and Public Protection (Policy, Countryside & Wildlife)	Reduction in Rights of Way Maintenance budget	5	5	

Appendix 5 – 2024/25 Savings and income generation proposals

Reference	Lead	Service Area	Description	£'000 2024/25 Total	£'000 2024/25 Saving	£'000 2024/25 Income generation
ENV26	Ceri Morris	Planning and Public Protection (Policy, Countryside & Wildlife)	Reduction in project work	5	5	
ENV27	Ceri Morris	Planning and Public Protection (Development Management)	Increase in non statutory preapplication fees above the 7.5% threshold	4		4
ENV28	Ceri Morris	Planning and Public Protection (Development Management)	Increase in the number of Planning Performance Agreements secured (PPAs)	1		1
ENV29	Ceri Morris	Planning and Public Protection (Building Control)	Reduction in spend on professional fees, general clothing, electrical testing, stationery etc	5	5	
	Total (ENV)			1,741	907	834
-	<u>Social Services, Health and Housing</u>	-				
SSHH2	Angela Thomas	Adults Services	Transport Reconfiguration - Change opening times of in house day services to enable environment transport to perform the paid for external transport. Time to implement, part year savings 23/24, full year saving is £150k	75	75	
SSHH3	Angela Thomas	Adults Services	Placements - Full review of placements	500	500	
SSHH4	Angela Thomas	Adults Services	Additional grant funding - Grant for 3 grade 10s (need confirmation of grant funding)	168		168
SSHH5	Angela Thomas	Adults Services	Staff restructuring - ER/VR offer for specific posts, part year saving 23/24, full year saving £239k	200	200	
SSHH6	Angela Thomas	Adults Services	0.5 Carers Monitoring Officer (G6) - Grant funding	15		15
SSHH7	Angela Thomas	Adults Services	Night Support Workers - Remove Sleep-in in high cost scheme and a cluster of schemes, (costing needs firming up, 140k + £35k x 6 schemes)	350	350	

Appendix 5 – 2024/25 Savings and income generation proposals

Reference	Lead	Service Area	Description	£'000 2024/25 Total	£'000 2024/25 Saving	£'000 2024/25 Income generation
SSHH8	Angela Thomas	Adults Services	Direct Payments - Full review of direct payments	100	100	
SSHH9	Keri Warren	Childrens Services	Reduction in residential placements - Savings of step-down to Foster Plus Scheme and Supported Accommodation. Draft budget for 24/25 is based on 17 fte placements, aim is for 15 fte by end of March 25. Savings factor in cost of Foster Plus/Supported Accommodation. Will take time to implement, anticipated part year saving in 24/25 is £221k, full year saving is £601k	221	221	
SSHH10	Keri Warren	Childrens Services	Hillside Recharge - Recharge Hillside fully for the support that children's service provide	92		92
SSHH11	Keri Warren	Childrens Services	Reduction in LAC Taxi Routes - Full review of all Taxi Routes to ensure Service is required, savings have already been identified in-year (23/24)	100	100	
SSHH12	Keri Warren	Childrens Services	Recharge existing Social Work staff to Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) Scheme - Continue to utilise existing staff as part of the UASC service delivery, funded via the Home Office	117	117	
SSHH13	Keri Warren	Childrens Services	Reduction in non-Looked after children (LAC) Allowances - Natural reduction in Residence Orders/Special Guardianship Allowances	50	50	
SSHH14	Andrew Jarrett	Business Support	Staff restructuring	75	75	
SSHH15	Chele Howard	Housing and homelessness	Service transformation - new housing support model			
	Total SSH&H			2,063	1,788	275

Appendix 5 – 2024/25 Savings and income generation proposals

Reference	Lead	Service Area	Description	£'000 2024/25 Total	£'000 2024/25 Saving	£'000 2024/25 Income generation
	<u>Strategy and Corporate Services (S&CS)</u>	-				
SCS1	Huw Jones	Finance Division	Permanent closure to the public of cash desks at Neath and Port Talbot Civic Centres.	52	52	
SCS2	Huw Jones	Finance Division	Contract savings from renewal of banking contract on revised terms	4	4	
SCS3	Huw Jones	Finance Division	Contract saving from re-tendered insurance contracts	82	82	
SCS4	Sheenagh Rees	People and Organisation Development Division	Explore potential to provide services under an SLA to support regeneration projects	25		25
SCS5	Sheenagh Rees	People and Organisation Development Division	Review Staffing structure	123	123	
SCS6	Craig Griffiths	Legal and Democratic Services	Undertake a review of legal services resources to ensure consolidation of spend and most efficient use. Work presently on-going to achieve this with the aim of also reducing the number of licenses. More to generic licences instead of a licence for each member of staff.	5	5	
SCS7	Craig Griffiths	Legal and Democratic Services	Implement development of a charging structure for Environmental Information Regulations searches following changes in law which can allow for charging in limited circumstances. Anticipated likely challenge from search providers so careful consideration must be given to development of structure and regime to avoid possibility of judicial review which might be likely. Work is ongoing with WLGA to discuss this in more detail.	5		5
SCS8	Craig Griffiths	Legal and Democratic Services	Development of a Celebrant Service within the Registrar Office (RO) to not only consider income generation but offer a service which there appears to be demand for in the community and which the Register Office staff appear to have knowledge and	5		5

Appendix 5 – 2024/25 Savings and income generation proposals

Reference	Lead	Service Area	Description	£'000 2024/25 Total	£'000 2024/25 Saving	£'000 2024/25 Income generation
SCS9	Craig Griffiths	Legal and Democratic Services	ability to progress. RO currently developing business plan to achieve. Review of fees and charging in Register Office to be undertaken with the aim of changing the legal status of the marriage room which would enable the Council to charge more for the current venue (in line with approach that other districts take). RO to work with Property and Regeneration to identify if any larger venues also available to assist in income generation. Work is ongoing with the General Register Office to discuss the process this would have to take	5		5
SCS10	Craig Griffiths	Legal and Democratic Services	Introduction of new fees for licensed premises and special procedure rules following amendment of UK Legislation. Timescale expected in 2024	20		20
SCS11	Craig Griffiths	Legal and Democratic Services	Increase in work capable of being recharged i.e. SWTRA, Margam Crematorium, Town and Community Councils, Tai Tarian and other parties	7		7
SCS12	Craig Griffiths	Legal and Democratic Services	Increasing Surcharges in Mailroom and making efficiencies in performance	3		3
SCS13	Craig Griffiths	Legal and Democratic Services	Deletion of Modern Apprentice in Legal Business Support (Currently Vacant) - Post is currently vacant but at present time team members are working at capacity in providing administrative support to legal officers and in Council wide processes. Increasing demand for digital bundles with HM Courts has meant workloads have changed requiring further time for officers in preparation. Whilst workloads	28	28	

Appendix 5 – 2024/25 Savings and income generation proposals

Reference	Lead	Service Area	Description	£'000 2024/25 Total	£'000 2024/25 Saving	£'000 2024/25 Income generation
SCS14	Craig Griffiths	Legal and Democratic Services	could be absorbed there will be a pressure on existing team members to meet demand. Increase income target in Commercial and Governance - Indications have been provided that in the next three to four years there will be additional in legal and procurement work from SWTRA. As a result of this we could increase the income target accordingly.	2		2
SCS15	Craig Griffiths	Legal and Democratic Services	Increase income target in Register Office - The budget is currently £212,000 whereas in the last financial year we have brought in £234,000 (this being without all the additional proposals we now have to increase). On the basis of the current registration figures, this figure is achievable without any detriment to service delivery.	6		6
SCS16	Craig Griffiths	Legal and Democratic Services	Reallocation of Corporate Joint Committee Funding - In the last two years there has been a sum of £25,000 which has been brought in from the Corporate Joint Committee which has for the most part been uncommitted. It was being kept to help meet training costs and to offset other legal costs incurred as a result of time spent by Dem Services and myself on CJC work.	35		35
SCS17	Chris Owen	Digital Services	Reviewing specific contracts including mobile telephony in light of hybrid working and reduction in photocopier numbers (separate to energy savings)	20	20	
SCS18	Chris Owen	Digital Services	Review of Service Level Agreements	20		20

Appendix 5 – 2024/25 Savings and income generation proposals

Reference	Lead	Service Area	Description	£'000 2024/25 Total	£'000 2024/25 Saving	£'000 2024/25 Income generation
SCS19	Chris Owen	Digital Services	As part of moving CCTV back to 24/7 operation, explore income generation options (e.g. extend coverage to Town Councils under SLAs, alarm line monitoring, concierge etc.)	15		15
SCS20	Chris Owen	Digital Services	Modernisation of technical infrastructure – power consumption cost reductions	29	29	
SCS21	Chris Owen	Digital Services	Remove current vacancies from structure	119	119	
	Total S&CS			610	462	148
	<u>Other / Council wide savings</u>	-				
CORP1	Huw Jones	Reduce energy contingency budget	Reduction in revenue budget set aside for energy efficiency - significant investment will require capital investment so provision made in capital programme	2,650	2,650	
CORP3	Karen Jones	Corporate Joint Committee	Rebate on CJC levy	60		60
	Total Other			2,710	2,650	60
	Grand total all savings and income generation			8,828	6,627	2,201

Appendix 6 – 2025/26 – 2028/29 Savings and income generation proposals

Reference	Lead	Service Area	Description	£'000 2025/26	£'000 2026/27	£'000 2027/28	£'000 2028/29
		<u>Directorate</u>					
		Schools		0	0	0	0
		Education, Leisure and Lifelong Learning		953	836	0	0
		Environment		390	185	0	0
		Social Services, Health and Housing		75	1,000	1,500	1,100
		Strategy and Corporate Services		250	350	0	0
		Other / Council wide savings		1,500	0	0	0
		Total		3,168	2,371	1,500	1,100

-	<u>Education, Leisure and Lifelong Learning (ELLL)</u>	-					
ELLL1	Chris Saunders	Margam Country Park	Car park changes, orangery improvements, catering improvements, motorhome site, land train and additional catering.	150	206		
ELLL2	Chris Saunders	Pontardawe Arts Centre	Additional events and catering improvements	40	40		
ELLL3	Chris Saunders	Princess Royal Theatre	Additional events and pricing review.	58			
ELLL4	Chris Saunders	Indoor leisure	Indoor Leisure - trading improvements.	100	100		
ELLL5	Chris Saunders	Aberafan Seafront	Seafront - New kiosk run in house	25			
ELLL6	Chris Saunders	Library Service			20		
ELLL7	Rhiannon Crowhurst	Home to school transport	Externally led review of all existing arrangements	500	400		

Appendix 6 – 2025/26 – 2028/29 Savings and income generation proposals

Reference	Lead	Service Area	Description	£'000 2025/26	£'000 2026/27	£'000 2027/28	£'000 2028/29
ELLL9	Rhiannon Crowhurst	Primary school cleaning	Full cost recovery - Increase cleaning recharge to schools phased over three years	80	70		
	Total (ELLL)			953	836	0	0
Reference	Lead	Service Area	Description of how saving/additional income will be achieved	£'000 2025/26	£'000 2026/27	£'000 2027/28	£'000 2028/29
-	<u>Environment (ENV)</u>	-					
ENV2	Simon Brennan	Accommodation review - phase 3	Further savings from rationalisation of buildings including depots	322			
ENV4	Simon Brennan	Former Metal Box building	This is a savings target aimed at removing the current operating subsidy of the former Metal Box premises in Neath.	185	185		
ENV5	Simon Brennan	Property & Regeneration (Strategic Funding)	City Deal Programme Management saving	-142			
ENV7	Mike Roberts	Gnoll Country Park	This is a savings target aimed at removing the current operating subsidy of the Gnoll Country Park. Details of how this will be achieved are to be developed.	25			
	Total (ENV)			390	185	0	0
Reference	Lead	Service Area	Description of how saving/additional income will be achieved	£'000 2025/26	£'000 2026/27	£'000 2027/28	£'000 2028/29
-	<u>Social Services, Health and Housing</u>	-					
SSHH1	Angela Thomas	Adult Social Care	Transformation of adult services including Trem-y-Glyn, Gelligron, Carers Service, Bespoked Enterprises and Falls Response		1,000	1,500	

Appendix 6 – 2025/26 – 2028/29 Savings and income generation proposals

Reference	Lead	Service Area	Description	£'000 2025/26	£'000 2026/27	£'000 2027/28	£'000 2028/29
SSHH2	Angela Thomas	Adults Services	Transport Reconfiguration - Change opening times of in house day services to enable environment transport to perform the paid for external transport. Time to implement, part year savings 23/24, full year saving is £150k Service transformation - new housing support model	75			
SSHH15	Chele Howard	Housing and homelessness					1,100
	Total SSH&H			75	1,000	1,500	1,100
SCS22	<u>Strategy and Corporate Services (S&CS)</u> Noelwyn Daniel	- Strategy and Corporate Services	Remodelling of Corporate Services to include Digital Services; Finance Division; Legal and Democratic Services; People and Organisational Development	250	350		
	Total S&CS			250	350	0	0
CORP2	<u>Other / Council wide savings</u> Huw Jones	- Council tax premiums	Possible introduction of council tax premium for second homes and long term empty properties. Subject to Member decision following consultation.	1,500			
	Total Other			1,500	0	0	0
	Grand total all savings and income generation			3,168	2,371	1,500	1,100

Appendix 7 – Schedule of reserves

Description	Reserve Balance at 1st April 2024 £	Original budget reserves 2024/25 £	Current Projected Balance @ 31st March 2025 £
Education, Leisure and Lifelong Learning			
<u>Delegated Schools Reserves</u>			
ERVR Primary	0	0	0
Primary Schools	2,247,682	0	2,247,682
Secondary Schools	Cr582,559	0	Cr582,559
Special Schools	Cr482,119	0	Cr482,119
Middle School	1,778,616	0	1,778,616
Repair & Maintenance	Cr161,160	0	Cr161,160
	2,800,460	0	2,800,460
<u>Education, Leisure and Lifelong Learning Other</u>			
Additional learning needs reserve	Cr1,102,000	165,000	Cr937,000
Equalisation Account-Education	Cr1,545,595	379,905	Cr1,165,690
Home to School Transport	Cr253,000	253,000	0
	Cr2,900,595	797,905	Cr2,102,690
Total Education Leisure & Lifelong Learning	Cr100,135	797,905	697,770
<u>Social Services, Health and Housing</u>			
Homecare ECM Equipment reserve	Cr90,000	90,000	0
Community Care Transformation Reserve	Cr1,014,735	1,014,735	0
Children's Residential Placements	0	0	0
SSHH IT Renewals Fund	Cr1,900,000	1,200,000	Cr700,000
Social Services Equalisation	Cr1,270,241	1,270,240	Cr1
Community Resilience Fund	Cr1,750,000	1,750,000	0
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 2024 £	Original budget reserves 2024/25 £	Current Projected Balance @ 31st March 2025 £
Ring fenced homecare funding	Cr82,000	0	Cr82,000
Youth Offending Team Reserve	Cr167,897	0	Cr167,897
Adoption Service	Cr380,000	380,000	0
Total Social Services, Health and Housing	Cr7,305,971	5,704,975	Cr1,600,996
<u>Environment</u>			
Transport Reserve	Cr540,173	60,000	Cr480,173
Asset Recovery Incentive Scheme	Cr87,894	0	Cr87,894
Swansea Bay City Deal	Cr256,000	0	Cr256,000
Local Development Plan	Cr355,337	76,787	Cr278,550
Parking improvement	Cr63,850	30,500	Cr33,350
DARE Reserve	0	0	0
Waste Reserve	Cr2,153,246	2,153,246	Cr0
Winter Maintenance Reserve	Cr568,429	0	Cr568,429
Neath Market	Cr253,107	0	Cr253,107
Baglan Bay Innovation centre - dilapidation reserve	Cr77,517	0	Cr77,517
Renewable Energy Reserve	Cr17,959	0	Cr17,959
Environmental Health - Housing Equalisation	Cr36,699	0	Cr36,699
LAWDC Contingency Reserve	Cr1,565,177	0	Cr1,565,177
Workways - NPT	0	0	0
Environment Equalization Reserve	Cr1,653,124	407,355	Cr1,245,769
Metal box Reserve	Cr242	0	Cr242
Pantteg Landslip Reserve	Cr434,961	0	Cr434,961
<u>Trading Account</u>			

Appendix 7 – Schedule of reserves

Description	Reserve Balance at 1st April 2024 £	Original budget reserves 2024/25 £	Current Projected Balance @ 31st March 2025 £
Operating Account -Equalisation	Cr36,043	0	Cr36,043
Vehicle Tracking	Cr21,186	0	Cr21,186
Vehicle Renewals	Cr3,967,798	Cr1,303,924	Cr5,271,722
Total Environment	Cr12,088,742	1,423,964	Cr10,664,778
<u>Strategy and Corporate Services</u>			
Elections Equalisation Fund	Cr166,139	30,000	Cr136,139
Health & Safety/Occupational Health	Cr40,501	0	Cr40,501
Digital Transformation Reserve	Cr1,170,000	848,500	Cr321,500
Schools IT Equalisation (HWB)	Cr400,000	0	Cr400,000
Development Fund for Modernisation	Cr32	0	Cr32
Digital renewal reserve	Cr1,234,394	0	Cr1,234,394
Chief Executives Equalisation Reserve	Cr97,736	50,000	Cr47,736
Organisational development reserve	Cr4,339,436	654,000	Cr3,685,436
Building Capacity	Cr120,295	70,000	Cr50,295
Voluntary Organisation Reserve	0	0	0
Total Strategy and Corporate Services	Cr7,568,533	1,652,500	Cr5,916,033
<u>Corporate Other</u>			
Insurance Reserve	Cr4,165,382	280,000	Cr3,885,382
Covid recovery	Cr594,350	594,350	0
Income Generation Reserve	Cr113,230	0	Cr113,230
Members Community Fund Reserve	26	0	26
Capital support reserve	Cr683,447	0	Cr683,447

Appendix 7 – Schedule of reserves

Description	Reserve Balance at 1st April 2024 £	Original budget reserves 2024/25 £	Current Projected Balance @ 31st March 2025 £
Hardship relief scheme	Cr1,125,000	0	Cr1,125,000
Service resilience	Cr89,750	89,750	0
Discretionary fund	Cr100,000	0	Cr100,000
Corporate Contingency	Cr2,659,495	653,442	Cr2,006,053
Strategic regeneration capacity building		0	0
Treasury Management Equalisation Reserve	Cr8,407,767	0	Cr8,407,767
Accommodation Strategy	Cr3,173,580	31,672	Cr3,141,908
Transformation and modernisation	Cr6,700,000	5,195,025	Cr1,504,975
Total Corporate Other	Cr27,811,975	6,844,239	Cr20,967,736
<u>Joint Committee</u>			
Margam Discovery Centre - Building Maintenance Reserve	Cr174,440	Cr57,333	Cr231,773
Workways - Regional Reserve	140	0	140
Environment Legacy Reserve (SWTRA)	Cr59,728	0	Cr59,728
Substance Misuse Area Planning Board	Cr153,568	0	Cr153,568
WB Safeguarding Board Reserve	Cr94,676	0	Cr94,676
Intermediate Care pooled fund	0	0	0
Total Joint Committee	Cr482,272	Cr57,333	Cr539,605
Total All Earmarked Reserves	Cr55,357,628	16,366,250	Cr38,991,378
General Reserve	Cr15,449,693	0	Cr15,449,693

Appendix 7 – Schedule of reserves

Description	Reserve Balance at 1st April 2024 £	Original budget reserves 2024/25 £	Current Projected Balance @ 31st March 2025 £
TOTAL ALL RESERVES	Cr70,807,321	16,366,250	Cr54,441,071

Appendix 8 – Summary of consultation responses

Draft Budget Proposals 2024-25

Consultation Responses Summary

1.0 Background

1.1 On 20 December 2023, Cabinet authorised officers to consult members of the public on the Draft Budget Proposals for 2024-25. The public consultation followed four of pre-consultation engagement activities in Aberafan Shopping Centre, Cymer Library, Neath Leisure Centre and Pontardawe Heritage Centre to help set out the context in which next year’s budget is being set. These took place in December 2023.

1.2 The consultation objectives were to:

- provide a mechanism for people to contribute their views to the budget setting process.
- find out if people agree or disagree with the 4 key objectives on which the Budget strategy is based, and the approaches taken to the savings and income generation measures proposed.
- provide a mechanism for people to make comments and suggestions on:
 - the proposal to use £6.8 million from specific reserves to address funding pressures in Social Services and help balance the budget in 2024-25; *and*
 - how supportive they would be of a Council Tax rise to help protect/avoid cuts to services provided by the council? *(the provisional local government settlement was announced on the same day that the consultation started and the questionnaire made it clear that the settlement would need analysis for the underlying impact to be understood, as a result, there were no firm proposals in relation to how much council tax might need to rise for 2024-25).*
- provide a mechanism for people to share any other suggestions they might have on how the council can reduce the budget gap.
- provide an opportunity for people to share any other views on our Draft Budget 2024-25 proposals (e.g. to comment on any of the other proposals detailed in the cabinet report).
- ensure that the consultation was available to as many residents and organisations as possible.

2.0 The Consultation Process

2.1 A range of engagement and consultation activities took place to gather feedback to help inform the 2024-25 budget setting process, as follows:

Date	Activity	No. of people Reached
20.12.23-10.1.24	Online questionnaires, and printed questionnaires with feedback boxes in 35 public venues across NPT	556 responses

Appendix 8 – Summary of consultation responses

20.12.23-10.1.24	Responses via letter/email/on behalf of organisations	6 responses
4 & 9.1.24	Internal engagement sessions with NPT Council employees(3 face-to-face and 1 MS Teams)	146 attendees
20.12.23-10.1.24	Stakeholder consultation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Town and Community Councils Liaison Forum 4.1.24 (15) Special Budget, Social Services, Housing and Community Safety Scrutiny Committee 4.1.24 (7) Special Budget, Education, Skills and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee - 8.1.24 (13) Cabinet (Policy and Resources) Scrutiny Sub Committee - 9.1.24 (8) Special Budget, Environment, Regeneration and Streetscene Services Scrutiny Committee - 10.1.24 (9) 	52 attendees
TOTAL		760

- 2.2 The consultation was promoted via:
- The council website - homepage (via the 'top tasks' button), consultations page and Let's Keep Talking pages.
 - Adverts/posters on TV screens in the Neath and Port Talbot Bus Stations and Neath Train Station.
 - Posters, printed questionnaires, an explainer leaflet and feedback boxes at 35 public venues including libraries, Celtic Leisure venues, civic centres and other public buildings.
 - The council's corporate social media accounts.
 - Press coverage generated by cabinet reports and press releases.
 - Internal communications channels (staff notice boards, staff newsletter, intranet, Viva Engage)

3.0 Summary of Main Findings from questionnaire on Draft Budget Proposals 2024-25

3.1 This report summarises the findings from the online questionnaire. A total of 556 questionnaires were completed during the consultation period (20.12.23 – 10.1.24). 549 were completed in English and 7 in Welsh, with 535 responding online and 21 via printed questionnaires.

3.2 One paper questionnaire was received after the consultation had closed.

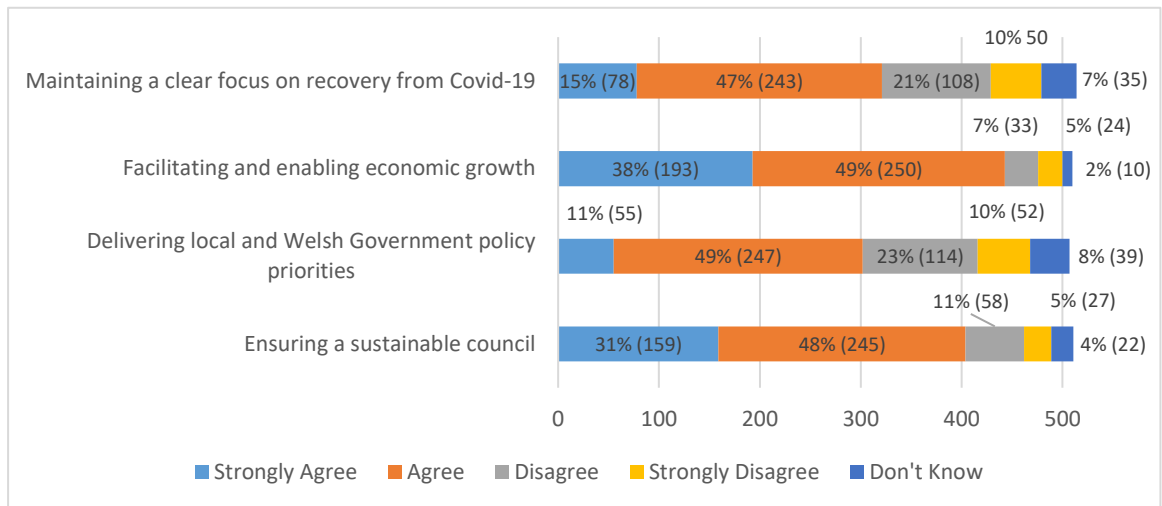
3.3 Summary of responses to main questions

Graphics are used in this report. Where percentages do not add to 100, this may be due to rounding to the nearest whole number, the exclusion of "don't know" categories, or multiple answers.

Appendix 8 – Summary of consultation responses

3.4 [Budget strategy - Key Objectives](#)

The 4 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. Responses were as follows:



Consultation Themes - Key Objectives

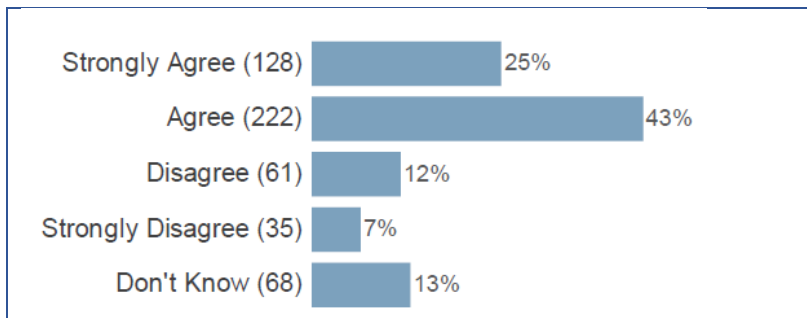
Respondents were invited to expand on their responses to the question on key objectives and the following themes emerged:

- there was generally a high level of support for the four proposed areas of focus
- a number of respondents questioned whether or how closely Welsh Government policy priorities aligned with local priorities and needs (with the introduction of the 25mph speed limit cited as an example by approx. 4% (25) of respondents)
- there were also a number of comments suggesting that COVID-19 should now be behind us, suggesting a lack of awareness of the ongoing impact

- 3.5 [Specific Reserves – Social Services](#) – Respondents were asked how they feel about the proposal to use £6.8 million from specific reserves to address funding pressures in Social Services and help balance the budget in 2024-25. Responses were as follows:

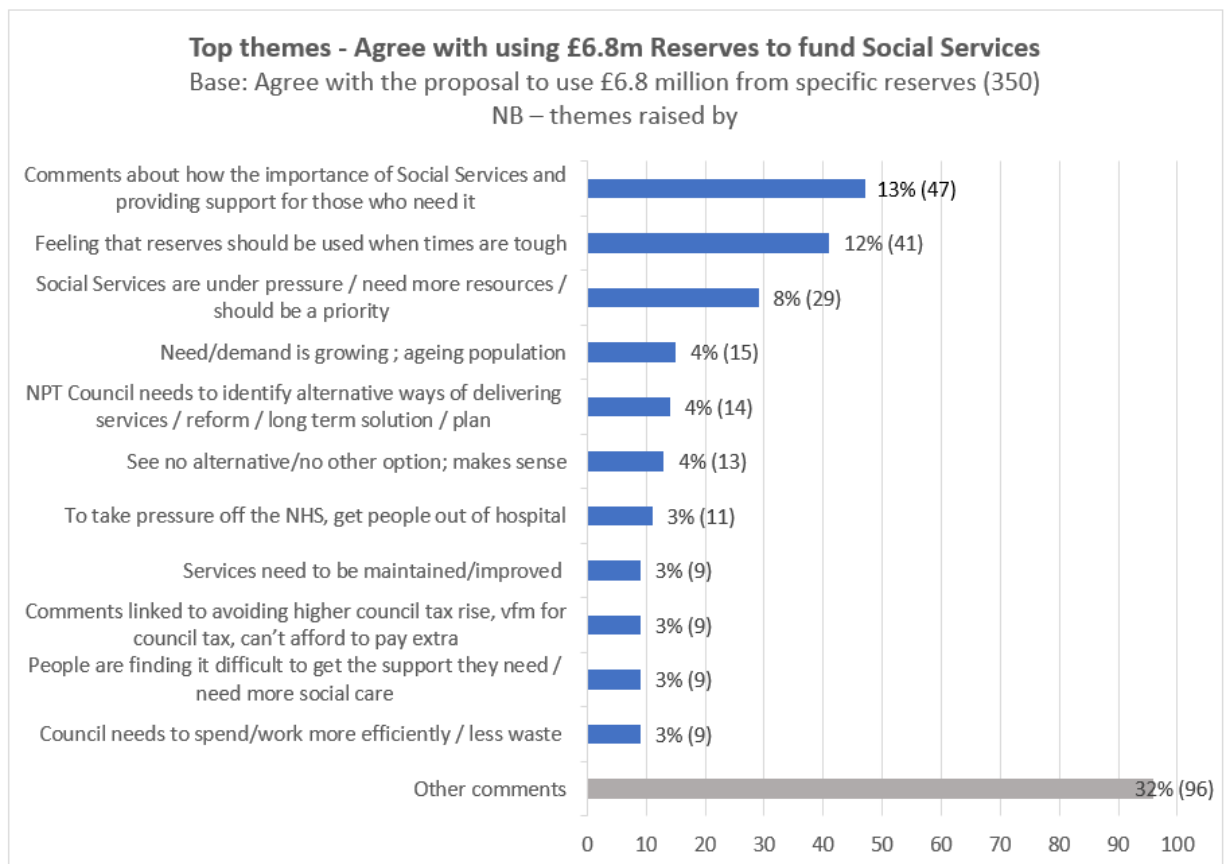
Base: All respondents who answered Q4: *How do you feel about the proposal to use £6.8 million from specific reserves to address funding pressures in Social Services and help balance the budget in 2024-25?* (514)

Appendix 8 – Summary of consultation responses



Consultation Themes – Specific Reserves Social Services:

Agree with proposal: of the 350 respondents who agree or strongly agree with the proposal to use £6.8 million from specific reserves to address funding pressures in Social Services and help balance the budget in 2024-25, 212 (61%) provided reasons for their response. The following chart summarises the main themes:



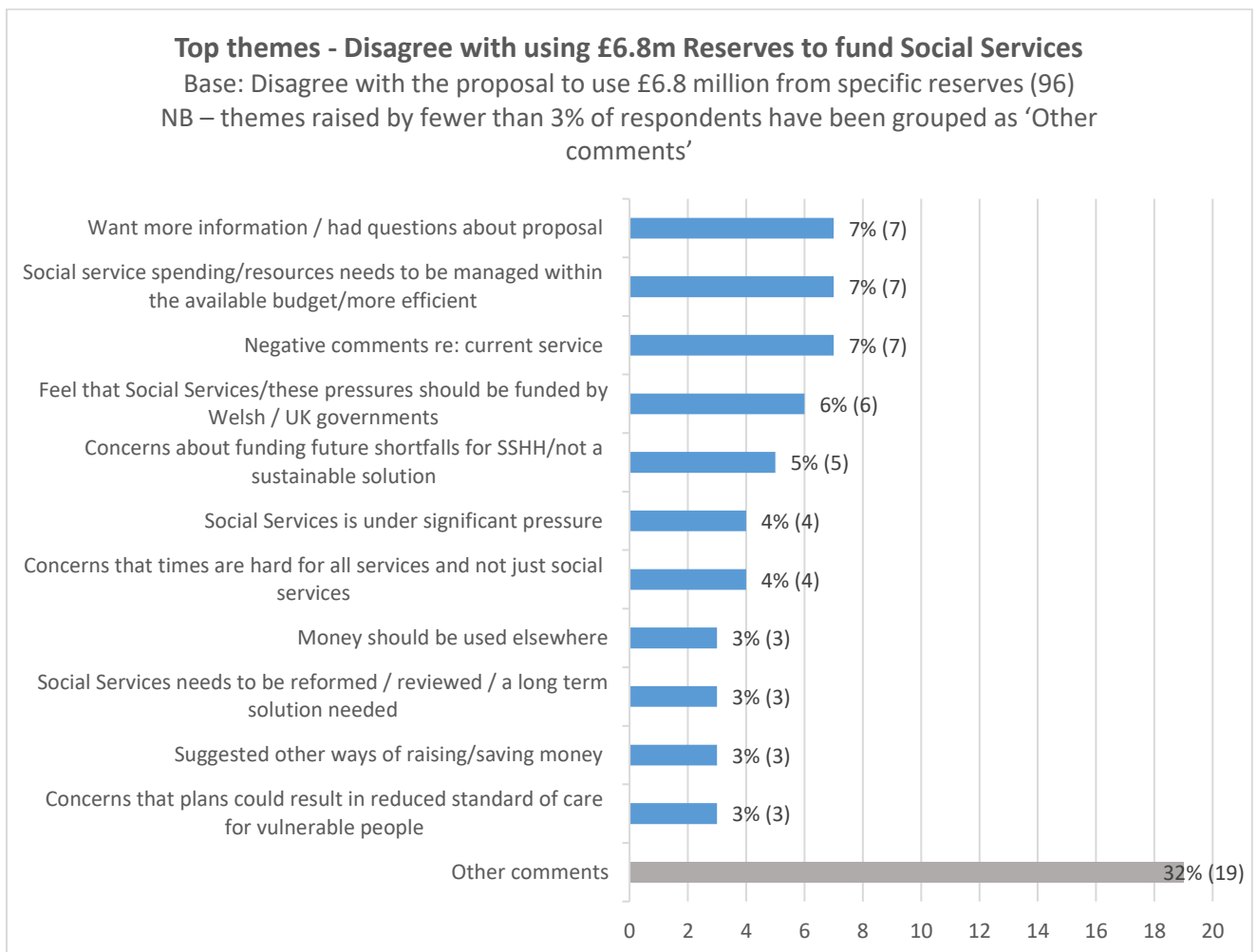
There were **11** themes mentioned by 3% or more of respondents who indicated that they agree with the proposal to use £6.8 million from specific reserves to address funding pressures in Social Services and help balance the budget in 2024-25.

Responses classified as 'other comments' included mentions of agreeing with this as a temporary measure/to give time to work on longer term solutions;

Appendix 8 – Summary of consultation responses

wanting assurance that the money will go into social services; concerns about future funding shortfalls and how they will be met once reserves are used; feeling they needed more detail about this proposal / what the plan is; feeling that service cuts are detrimental to the whole area / investing will benefit the area.

Disagree with proposal: of the 96 respondents who disagree or strongly disagree with the proposal to use £6.8 million from specific reserves to address funding pressures in Social Services and help balance the budget in 2024-2565, 65 (68%) provided reasons for their response. The following chart summarises the main themes:



There were **11** themes mentioned by 3% or more of respondents who indicated that they disagree with the proposal to use £6.8 million from specific reserves to address funding pressures in Social Services and help balance the budget in 2024-25.

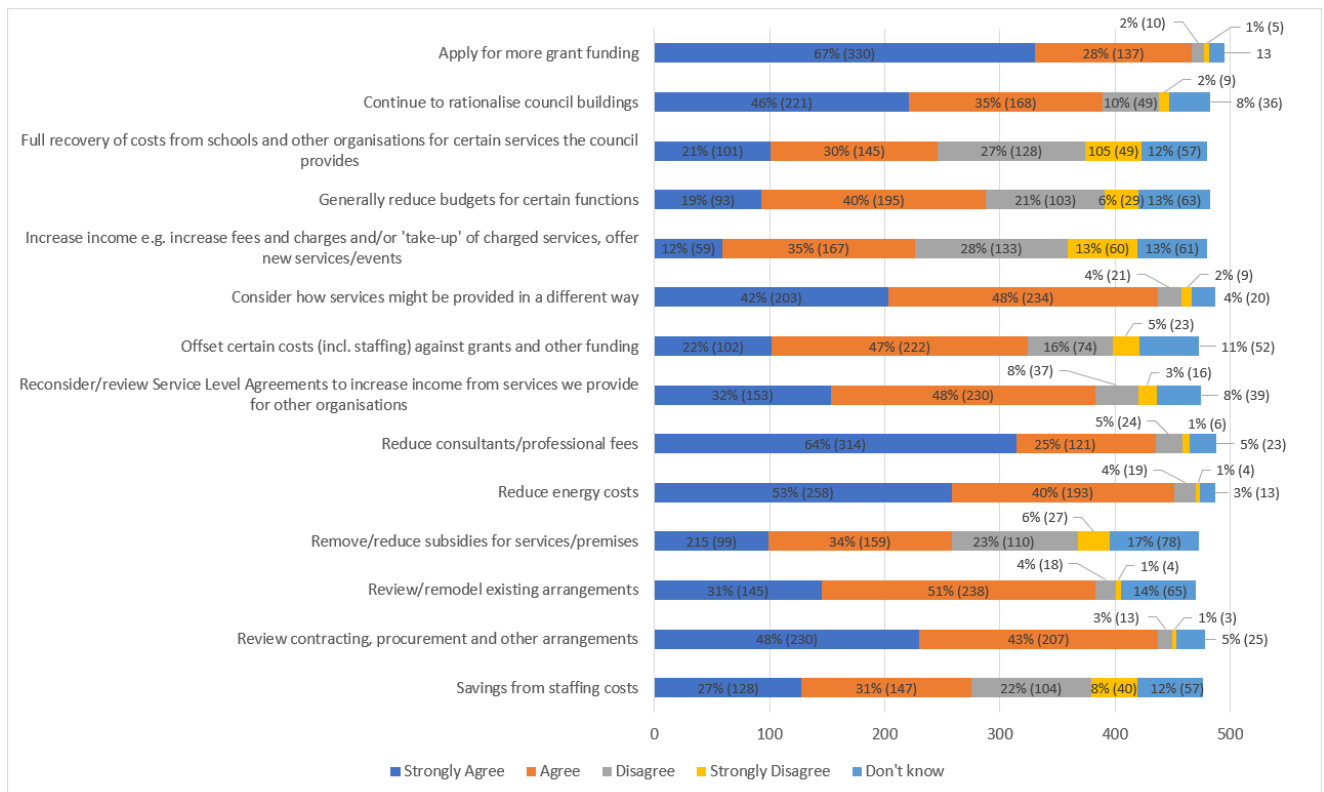
Responses classified as 'other comments' included mentions of concerns the money will run out leading to Council Tax increases; comments that Social

Appendix 8 – Summary of consultation responses

Services money shouldn't be used to balance the budget; comments about perceived poor management by the council.

- 3.6 [Approaches aimed at minimising the impact on service delivery and council tax payers](#) - more than 80 savings and income generation proposals (with an estimated value of £8.2m) were included in the Cabinet Report of 20 December, 2023. These reflect a number of approaches aimed at minimising the impact on service delivery and council tax payers.

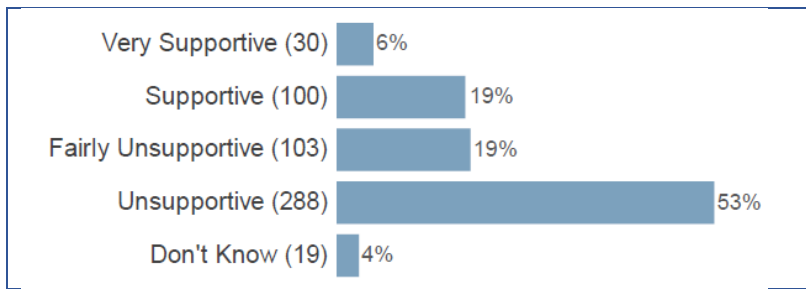
Respondents were asked how strongly they feel that the council should pursue these approaches. Responses were as follows:



- 3.7 [Council Tax](#) – Respondents were asked how supportive they would be of a Council Tax rise to help protect/avoid cuts to services provided by the council. Responses were as follows:

Base: All respondents who answered Q6: *How supportive would you be of a Council Tax rise to help protect/avoid cuts to services provided by the council?* (540)

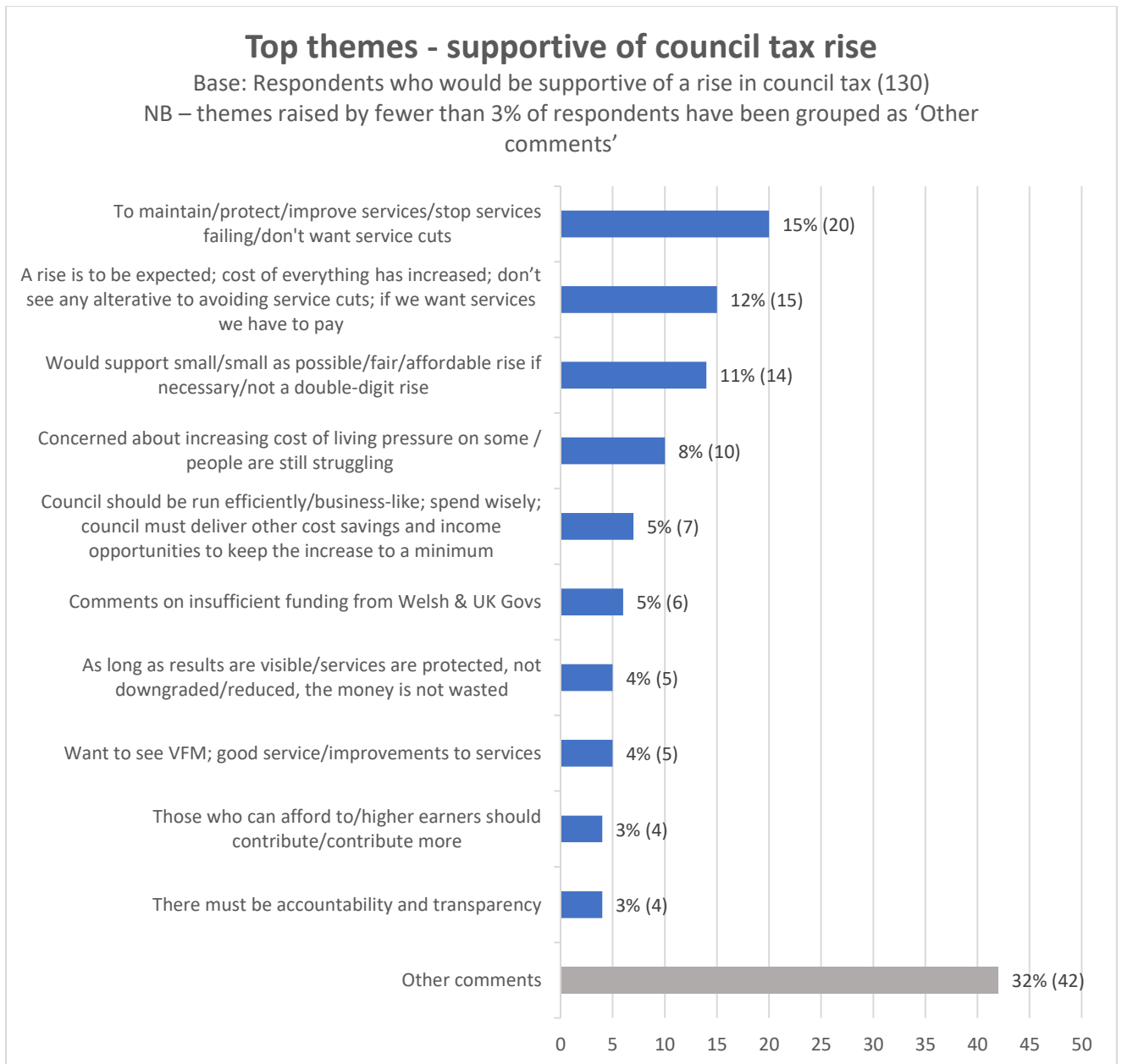
Appendix 8 – Summary of consultation responses



Consultation Themes – Council Tax

Supportive: of the 130 respondents who indicated they would be “supportive” or “very supportive”, 90 (69%) gave reasons for their response. The following chart summarises the main themes (*nb. some respondents raised issues relating to more than one theme so the total number of themes exceeds the number of respondents*):

Appendix 8 – Summary of consultation responses

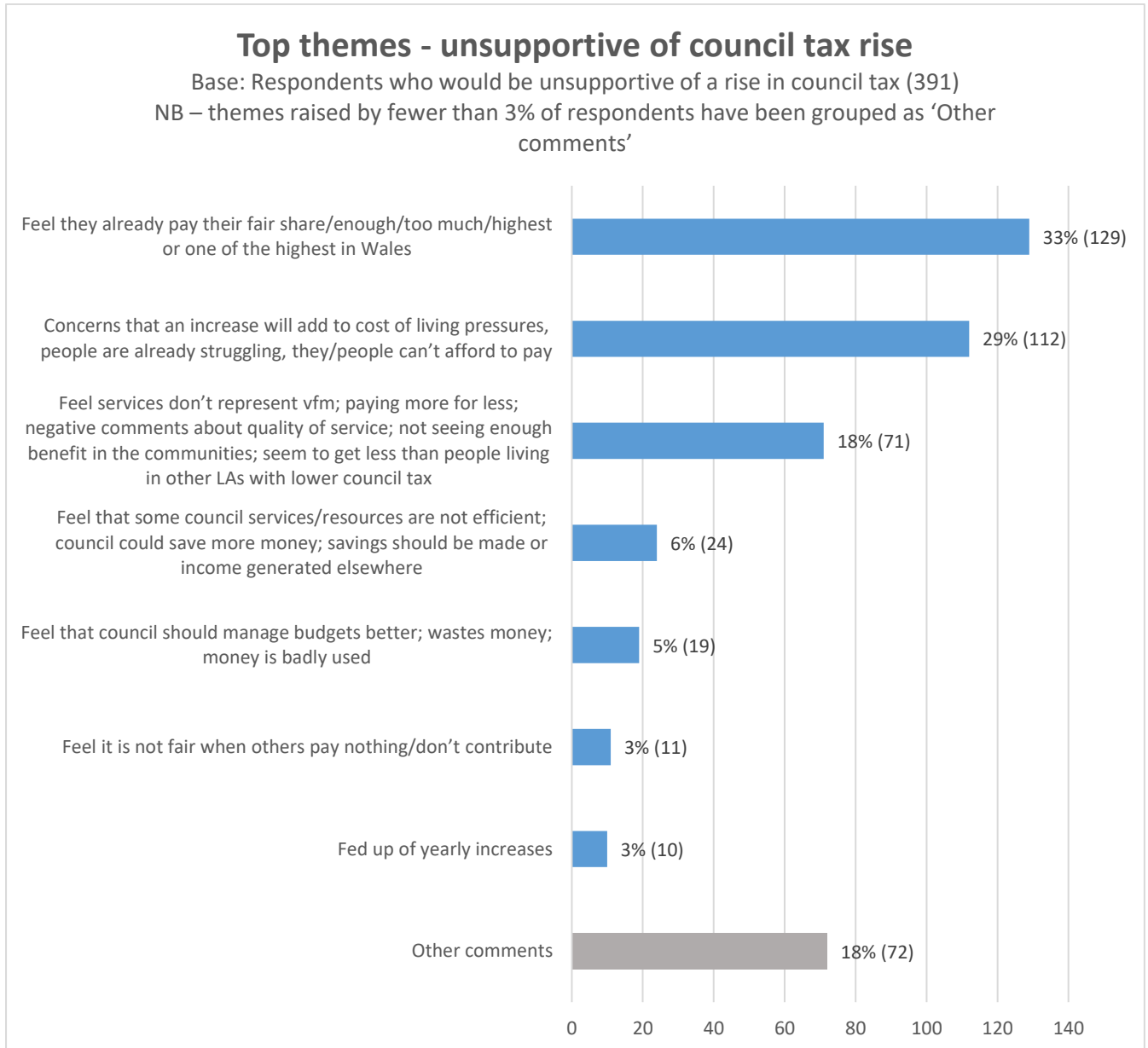


There were **10** themes mentioned by 3% or more of respondents who indicated that they would be supportive of a Council Tax rise to help protect/avoid cuts to services.

Responses classified as 'other comments' included mentions of council tax in NPT already being high/one of the highest; the view that cutting services causes lasting damage; feeling that any rise in council tax should only match or be at maximum the rate of inflation.

Unsupportive: of the 391 respondents who indicated they would be "unsupportive" or "fairly unsupportive", 289 (74%) gave reasons for their response. The following chart summarises the main themes (*nb. some respondents raised issues relating to more than one theme so the total number of themes exceeds the number of respondents*):

Appendix 8 – Summary of consultation responses



There were **7** themes mentioned by between 3% and 33% of respondents who indicated that they would be unsupportive or fairly unsupportive of a Council Tax rise to help protect/avoid cuts to services.

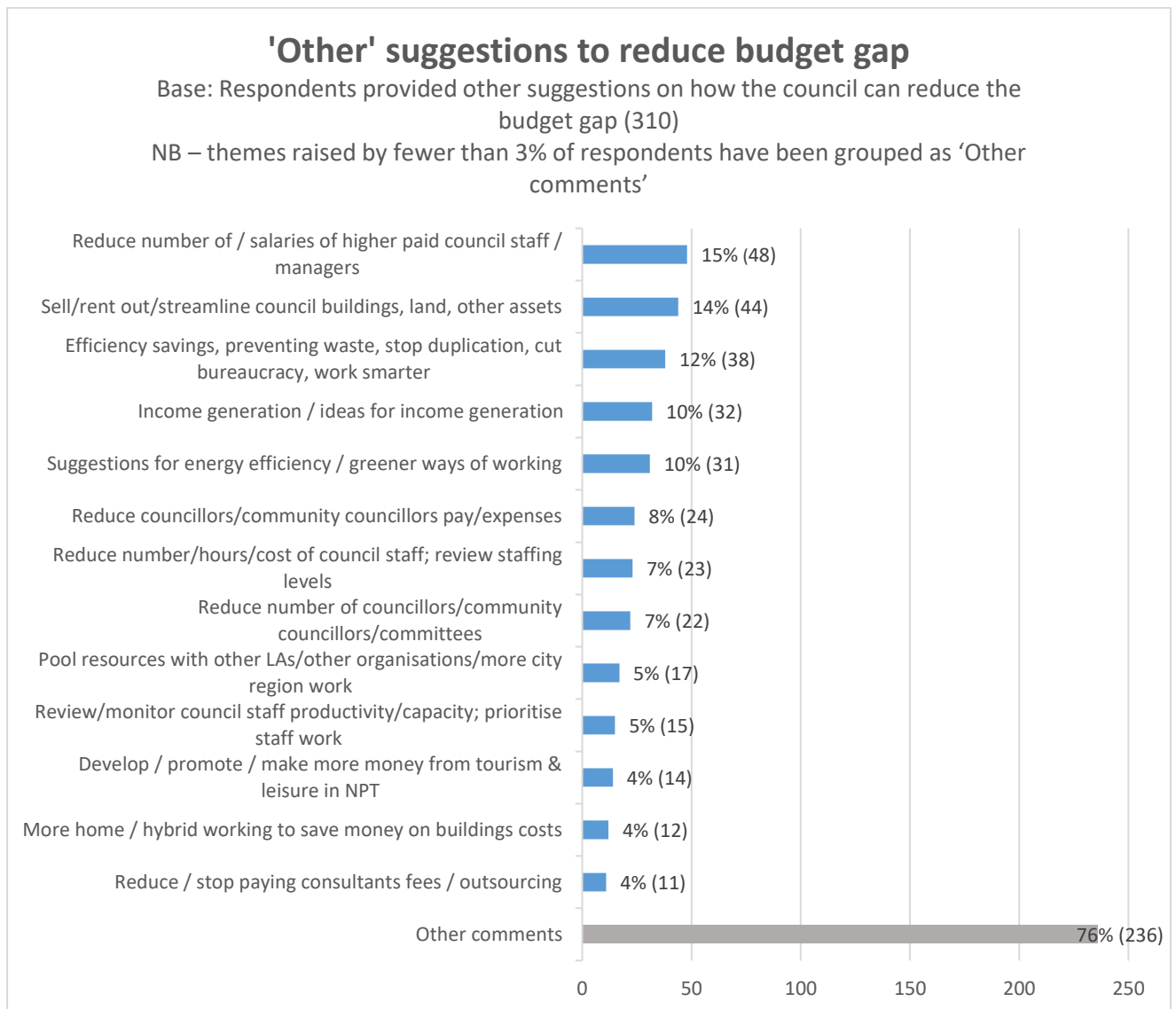
Responses classified as 'other comments' included mentions of respondents being unsupportive of the council running/funding/bringing leisure services back in-house or feel that those who don't use the services shouldn't have to pay for them; suggestions that the council should cut staff/councillors wages bill instead; comments that any additional income must be spent on essentials/used wisely/not wasted.

Appendix 8 – Summary of consultation responses

3.8 [Other suggestions](#) – Respondents were asked if they have any other suggestions on how the council can reduce the budget gap. The main themes were as follows:

Key themes – Other suggestions on how the council can reduce the budget gap

310 (56%) of respondents provided other suggestions on how the council can reduce the budget gap. The following chart summarises the main themes (*nb. some respondents raised issues relating to more than one theme so the total number of themes exceeds the number of respondents*):



There were **13** themes mentioned by 3% or more of respondents who gave other suggestions on how the council can reduce the budget gap.

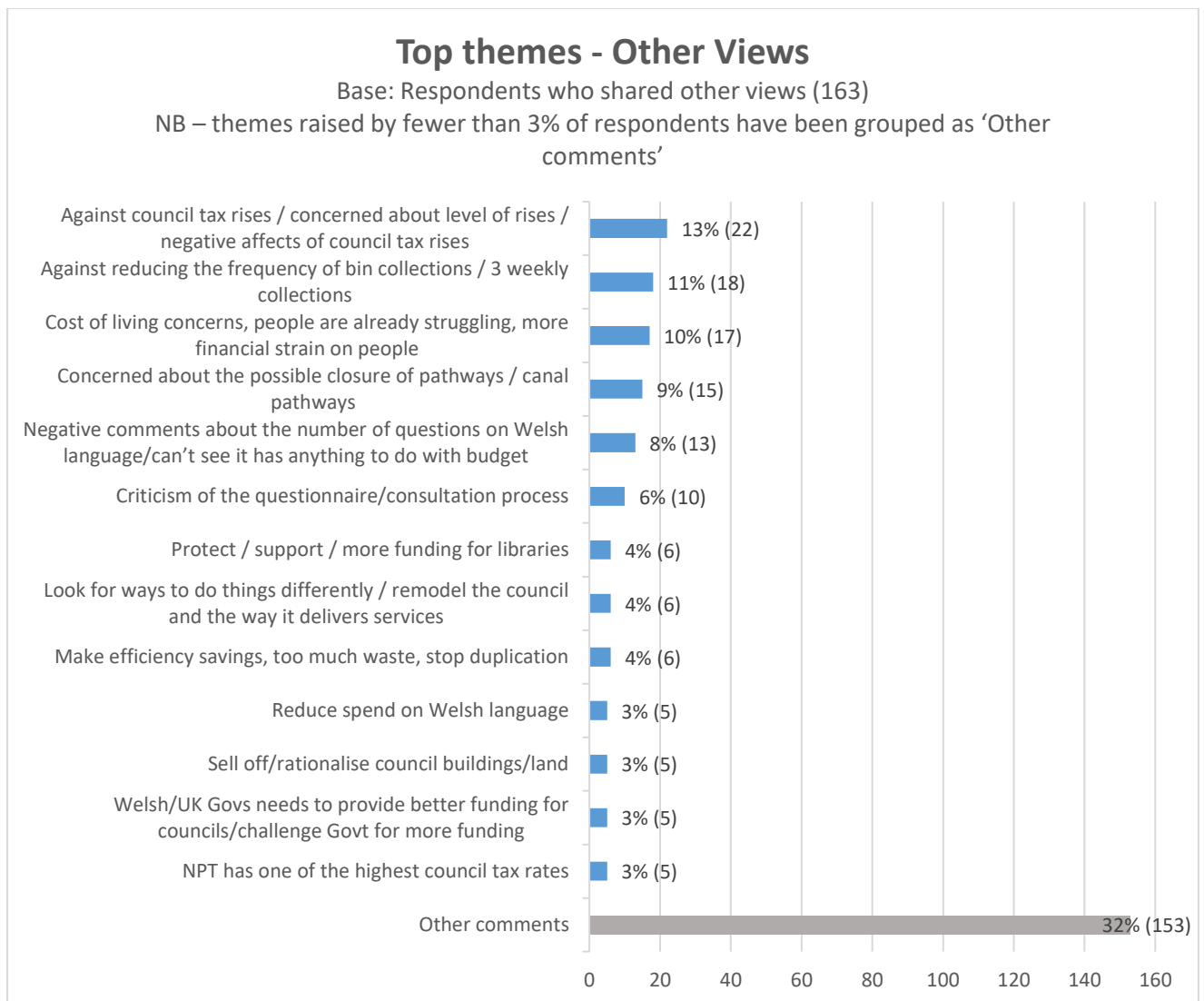
Responses classified as 'other comments' included mentions of suggestions to get rid of position of mayors(s)/formal events/cars; comments against funding leisure or views that other things should take priority over leisure;

Appendix 8 – Summary of consultation responses

views that spend should be prioritised for important things / services people use most / statutory services rather than “big developments”; perception that some people “abuse the system” / don’t contribute.

3.9 [Other views on the draft budget proposals for 2024-25](#) – Respondents were asked if they have any other views on our Draft Budget 2024-25 proposals that they would like to share?

163 (29%) respondents took the opportunity to share other views on our Draft Budget proposals for 2024-25. The following chart summarises the main themes (*nb. some respondents raised issues relating to more than one theme so the total number of themes exceeds the number of respondents*):



There were **13** themes mentioned by 3% or more of respondents who gave views on the draft budget proposals for 2024-25.

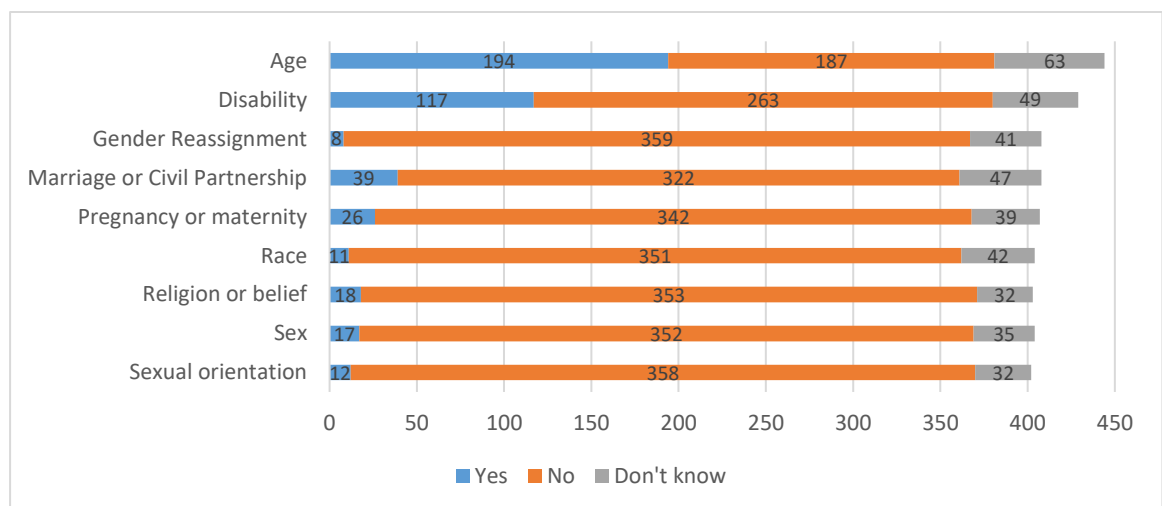
Appendix 8 – Summary of consultation responses

Responses classified as ‘other comments’ included mentions of energy efficiency/ sustainable energy measures / green energy suggestions; a need for funding/ investment in Neath; suggestions to cut down on council staff numbers/costs/pay; develop/promote/make more money from tourism and leisure in NPT; reduce the number of/pay for managers and senior staff; invest in/encourage more businesses/shops into town centres; perception that decisions are already made.

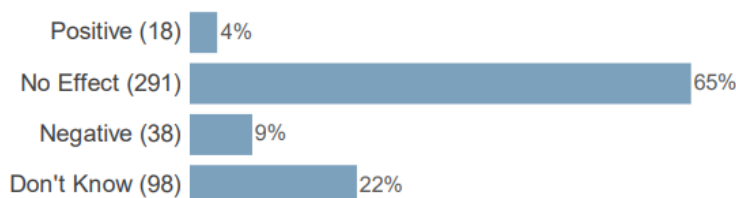
4.0 Questions to inform the Integrated Impact Assessment

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

Would our Draft Budget 2024-25 proposals have an impact on you and/or your family because of your and/or their:

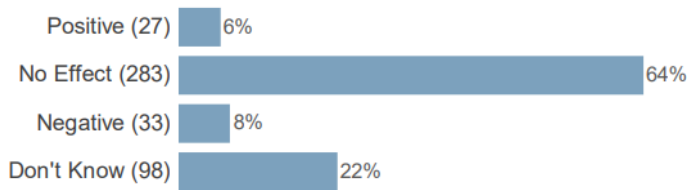


What effect do you think our Draft Budget 2024-25 proposals will have on people's opportunities to use the Welsh Language?



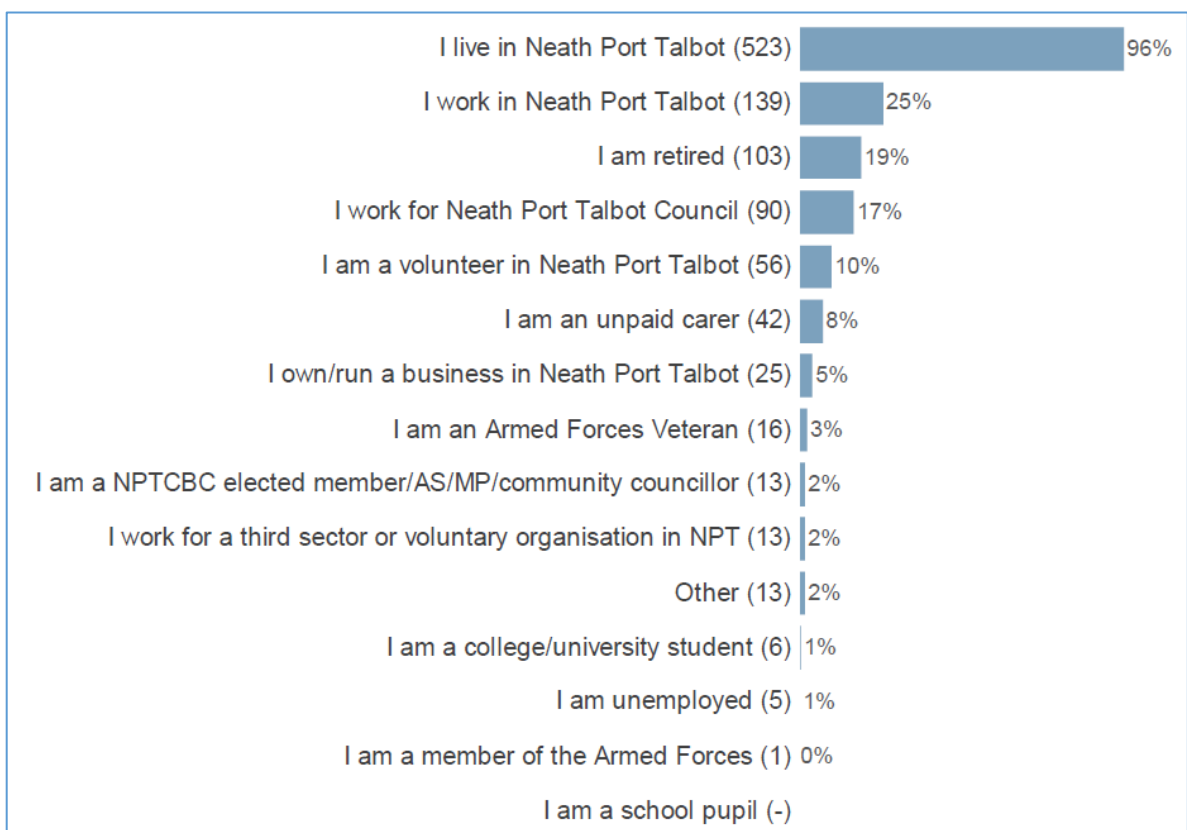
What effect do you think our Draft Budget 2024-25 proposals will have on treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language?

Appendix 8 – Summary of consultation responses



4.2 [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 total number of respondents*):



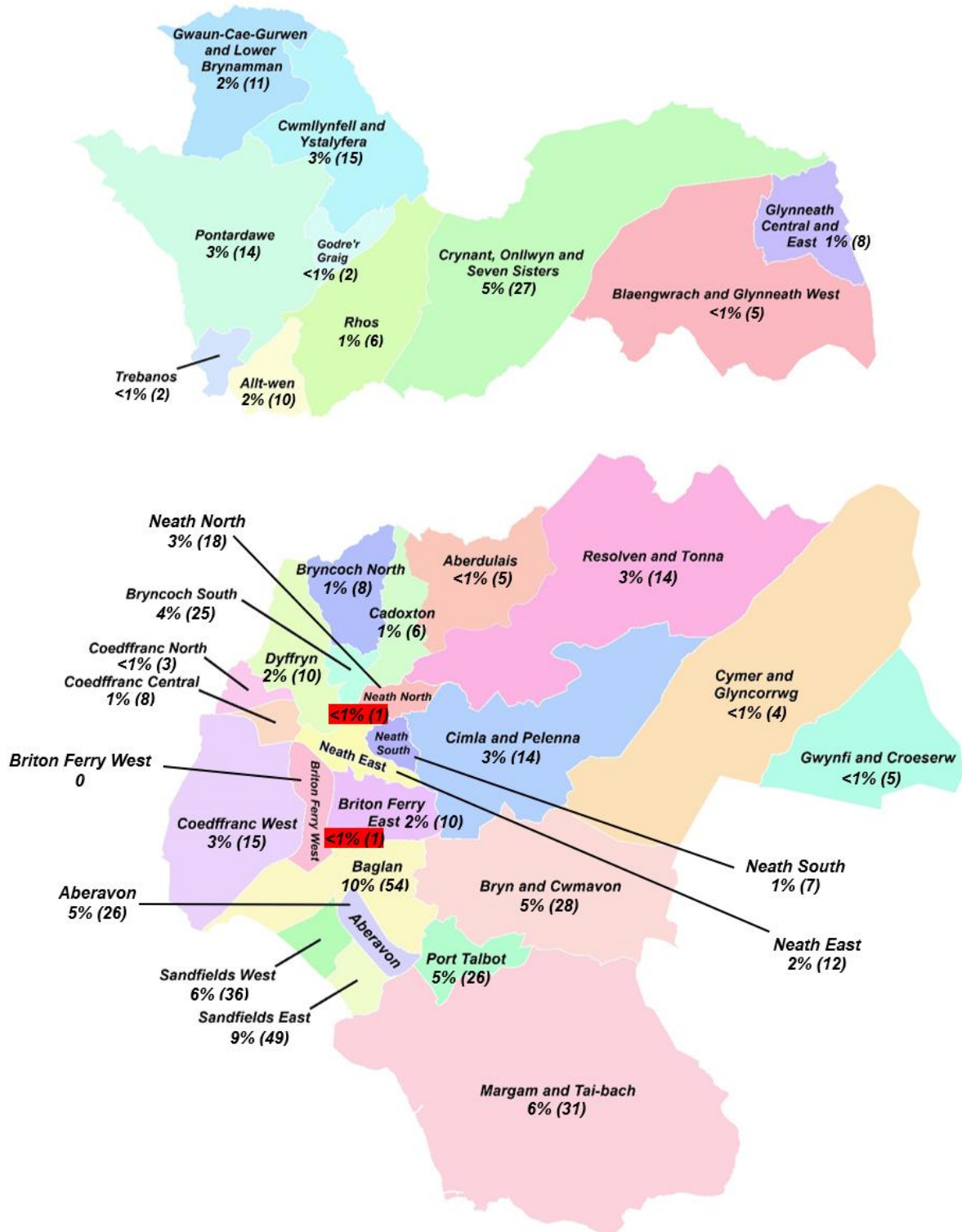
Respondents by ward:

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

- 3% (17) of respondents chose not to provide their postcode
- 2% (13) of the postcodes provided were outside of NPT

Appendix 8 – Summary of consultation responses

- 1% (5) of respondents provided a partial or invalid postcode
- 1% (5) of respondents provided a postcode for their place of work
- Less than 1% (2) of respondents provided postcodes for streets that span 2 electoral wards – these are for Briton Ferry East/West and Neath East/South and are highlighted in red on the map.

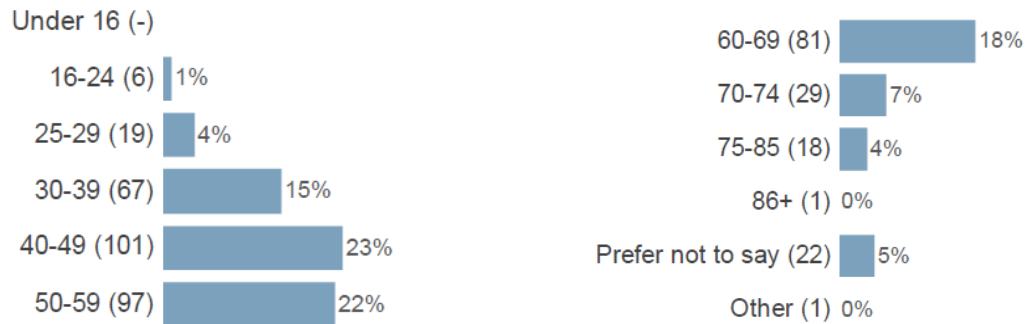


The percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number. Base = the total number of respondents (556)

Appendix 8 – Summary of consultation responses

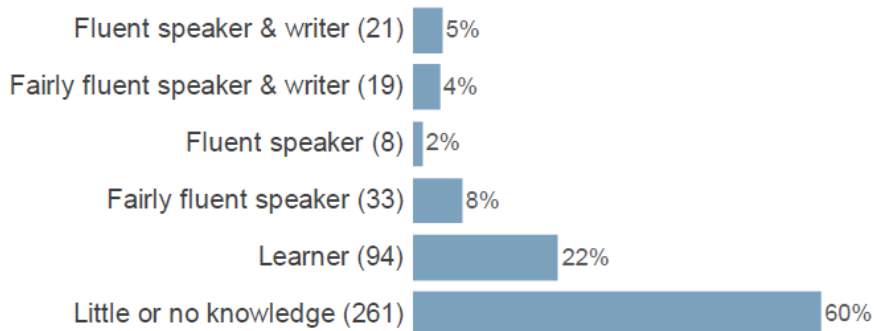
The age profile of respondents was as follows:

(Base 442)



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

(Base 436)



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

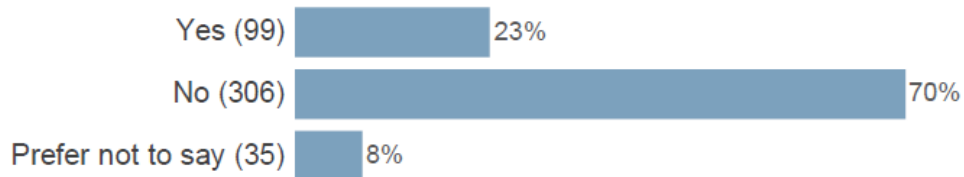
(Base 436)



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

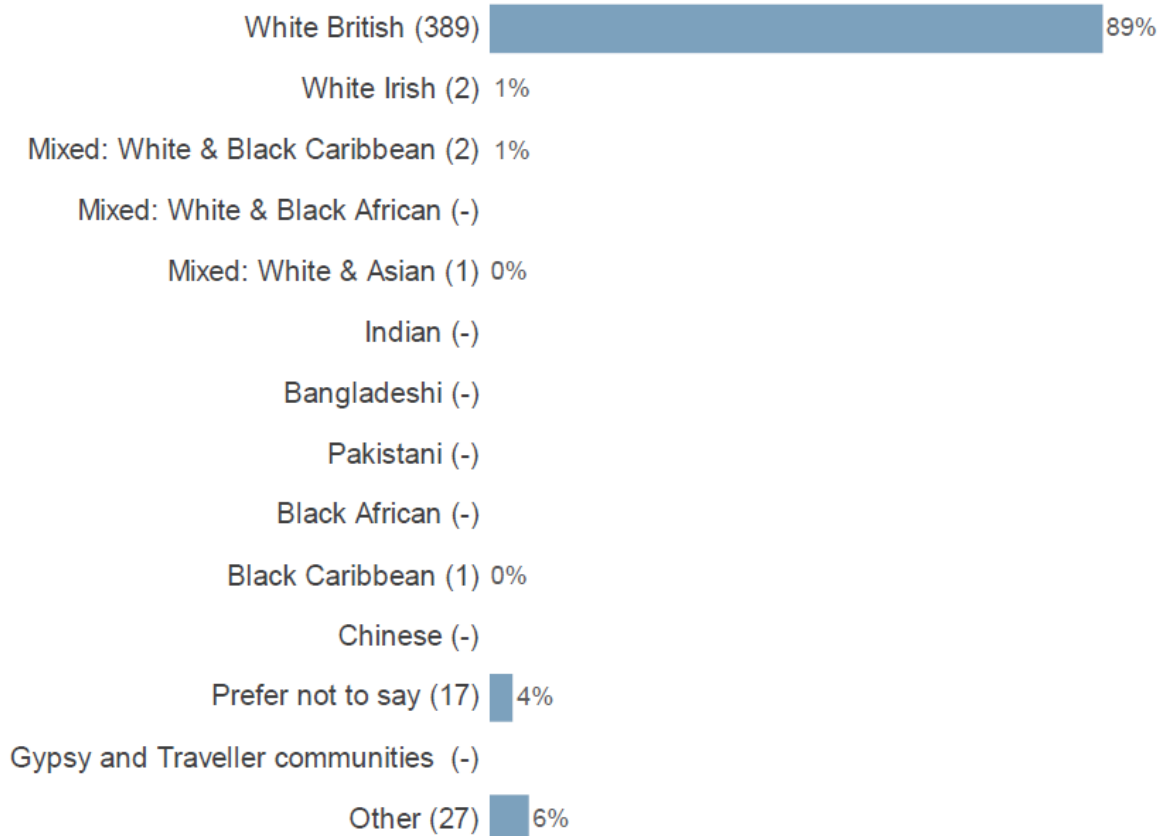
(Base 440)

Appendix 8 – Summary of consultation responses



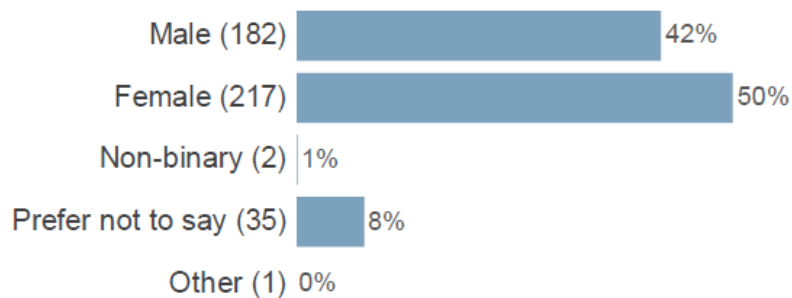
Respondents were asked to indicate their ethnic origin:

(Base 439)



The breakdown in terms of gender of respondents was:

(Base 437)



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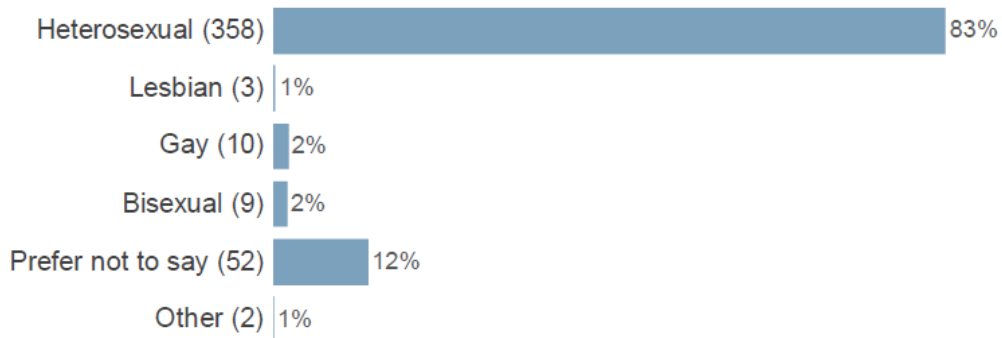
Respondents were asked to indicate whether their gender is the same as the sex they were registered at birth?

(Base 418)



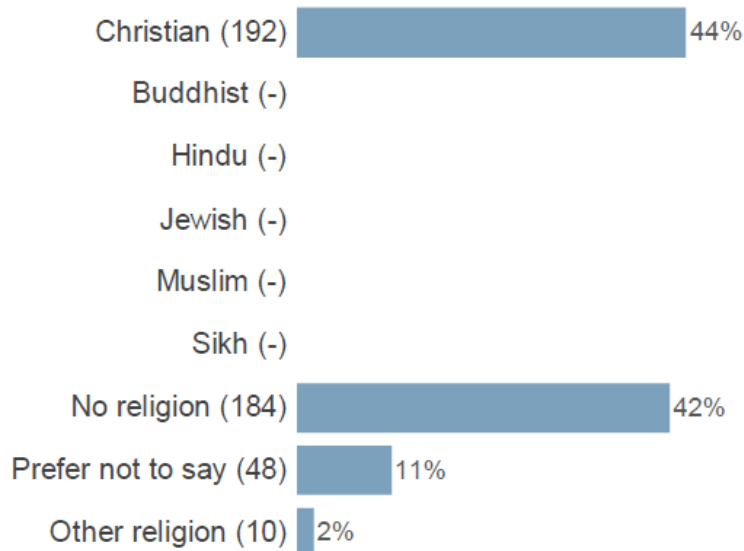
When asked about sexual orientation, responses were as follows:

(Base 434)



Respondents were asked to indicate their religion / belief:

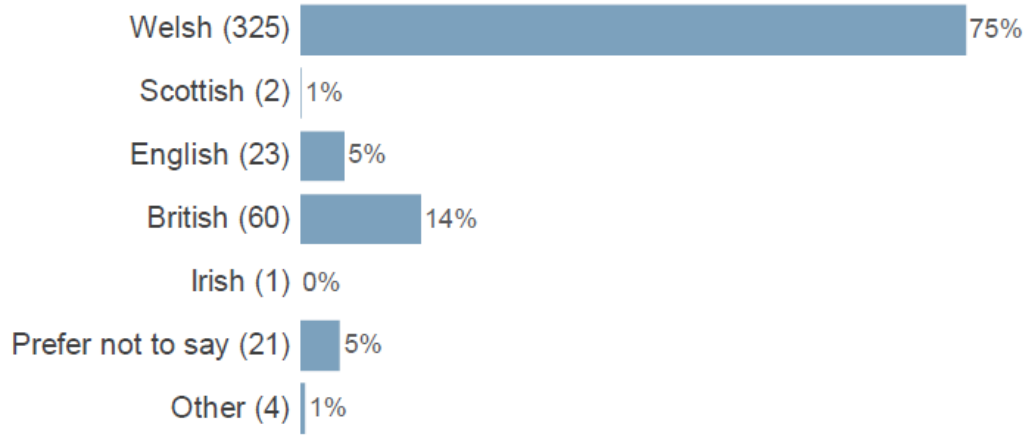
(Base 434)



Finally, in terms of nationality, respondents indicated the following:

(Base 436)

Appendix 8 – Summary of consultation responses



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: Final budget proposals 2024/25
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 2024/25.</p> <p>The Final Budget proposals include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Investment of £4.7m in additional service pressures over and above cost increases arising as a result of inflationary pressures. ➤ Savings of £8.8m with minimal impacts on service levels ➤ An increase in Council tax of 7.9% ➤ 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 and a number of briefing sessions. Members of the Cabinet also held a number of engagement sessions across the County Borough to explain the financial position the Council is facing to residents.</p> <p>Separate consultation exercises were conducted on proposals to remodel adult social care; homelessness and to modify street lighting. These are subject of separate Integrated Impact Assessment reports and have/are being reported separately to the relevant cabinet boards.</p>

Appendix 9 – Integrated Impact Assessment

	<p>Over the summer of 2023, the Council initiated a Let’s Keep Talking exercise to canvas views from a wide range of residents about what matters to them. This engagement helped to shape proposals at a formative stage before more detailed testing of specific proposals in the budget process itself.</p> <p>The Cabinet considered the draft revenue budget for 2024/25 at its December 2023 meeting and authorised formal public consultation between 20th December 2023 and 10th January 2024.</p> <p>A separate budget consultation report is included with this report and that summarises the consultation activities, responses received and main themes emerging.</p>
1f	<p>What were the outcomes of the consultation?</p> <p>Key objectives – there was broad agreement to the four key objectives contained within the budget strategy.</p> <p>Council Tax – 23% (130) indicated that they would be supportive or very supportive of a council tax increase to meet rising costs, with comments around increased costs needed to be paid for somehow. There was also an acknowledgement that increasing council tax would protect jobs and services. 72% (391) of responses were unsupportive of a council tax rise of up to 10%, with the main themes being expressing concerns around adding to the existing cost-of-living pressures and views that resident of the county borough are already paying a high level of council tax.</p> <p>Use of Reserves to fund Social Services - There was broad agreement that specific reserves should be used to fund social services costs with a view to implementing longer term cost saving measures.</p> <p><u>Changes to original proposals</u></p> <p>Council Tax – The final proposal around council tax is a proposed rise of 7.9% made up of:</p>

1.24% to fund the increased fire service levy
2.00% to fund the increased cost of running indoor leisure services
4.66% to fund all other Council services.

Street lighting

The proposal to switch off some street lighting columns at night has been withdrawn from the Budget proposals. Further consideration of the proposal to switch off lighting columns will be undertaken in 2024-25, in particular the need to reassure residents.

Termination of Neath Canal public access rights agreement

This proposal has been withdrawn as the legal process will take longer than initially advised.

Full cost recovery of primary school cleaning

This proposal is now being phased over a three year period to mitigate the impact on schools.

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 relating to protected characteristics and Welsh language etc., is also collected which in turn informs policy development and service provision.

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.

A number of separate consultations were carried out in addition to the budget consultation namely:

- A public consultation in relation to the proposals to trim, dim and part switch off street lights
- A public consultation on housing and homelessness strategic plan
- A public consultation on a draft adult social care strategy

Responses from talking to people about what matters to them through the council's Let's Keep Talking engagement campaign were also considered in relation to the budget setting process.

The budget public consultation questionnaire specifically asked respondents to comment on how the budget proposals would impact on them and/or their family in relation to any protected characteristic(s), as well as

their views on whether the proposals would impact on people's opportunities to use the Welsh Language or on treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language.

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 2024/25 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 that indicated that the proposals would have an impact were as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Age – 44% (194) - 69 indicated that they were between 16 and 59, and 105 were between 60 – 86+. Concerns about increases in costs/council tax when people are already struggling due to the cost-of-living crisis were a theme across all age groups. One of the main themes raised by older respondents were that any increases in costs/council tax would adversely impact on them

<p>Sexual orientation</p>	<p>as they are living on a pension. Some people in the older age groups also raised concerns about a perceived threat of closure for the canal path, there were also concerns about cuts to services, comments that some older people can't access online services; lack of public transport and the potential for social isolation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disability – 27% (117). The main themes in the reasons for the responses to this included concerns about any increase in council tax; comments that costs are higher for households/families with members who have disabilities; the need to protect social services for the future; concerns about limited income or limited opportunities to earn because of disability; concerns about increases in costs/council tax when people are already struggling due to the cost of living crisis; concerns about a perceived threat of closure for the canal path and the impact of this on the ability to exercise; some respondents had children with Additional Learning Needs and were concerned about the potential impact of budget challenges on the ability of the council to provide appropriate support; comments about the need for accessible transport; concerns about poor services in health care. • Gender reassignment – 2% (8). There was 1 reason given for the responses relating to gender reassignment. This was the concern that the council will be implementing “<i>sexist anti-female policies</i>” • Marriage & civil partnership – 10% (39). There were 3 reasons given for the responses relating to Marriage & civil partnership. These related to pressure on relationships because of additional financial burdens; and having to delay
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	<p>getting married because of financial pressures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pregnancy and maternity – 6% (26). 7 respondents gave for their responses relating to pregnancy and maternity. These included pregnant women being forced to go back to work early because of financial pressures; putting off having children because of the cost-of-living; concerns about finances because of new or expected babies; the view that pregnant adults are more vulnerable and reliant on services. • Race – 3% (11) of respondents said the draft budget proposals would impact them or their family because of race, but none of the respondents provided reasons for their response. • Religion or belief – 5% (18). One respondent expressed the belief that Christmas should be recognised as a celebration of the birth of Christ and not just any old public holiday. • Sex – 4% (17). There was 1 reason given for the responses relating to gender reassignment. This was the concern that the council will be implementing <i>“sexist anti-female policies”</i> • Sexual orientation – 3% (12). There was 1 reason given for the responses relating to gender reassignment. This was the concern that the council will be implementing <i>“sexist anti-female policies”</i> <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</p>
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those of all respondents. The purpose was to identify whether the proposals might disproportionately affect these groups. Any noteworthy variations are outlined below:

- proposal for a council tax rise next year:
23% (130) of all respondents were supportive or very supportive of this proposal. Of those who provided their age, the older age groups were more likely to be supportive/very supportive of this proposal – the 70-74; 75-85 and 86+ groups were the only groups where the numbers of people supportive of a council tax increase was higher than those who were unsupportive:

Council tax supportive / very supportive	Council tax unsupportive:
70-74 = 57% (16)	70-74 = 43% (12)
75-85 = 56% (10)	75-85 = 44% (8)
86+ = 100% (1)	

All other age groups were more likely to be unsupportive / fairly unsupportive of the proposal, especially those falling into the 30-69 years age groups:

Council tax supportive / very supportive	Council tax unsupportive:
16-24 = 40% (2)	16-24 = 60% (3)
25-29 = 6% (1)	25-29 = 94% (16)
30-39 = 15% (9)	30-39 = 85% (53)
40-49 = 19% (19)	40-49 = 81% (81)

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50-59 = 27% (24)	50-59 = 73% (66)
60-69 = 37% (28)	60-69 = 63% (48)

One of the respondents who was pregnant or on maternity leave was supportive of this proposal, 1 didn't know and 6 were unsupportive. Slightly more male respondents 32% (56) agreed/strongly agreed with this proposal than Female respondents 26% (52).

- Proposal to use £6.8 million from specific reserves to address funding pressures in Social Services and help balance the budget in 2024-25:
68% of all respondents who answered this question agreed or strongly agreed. This is mirrored by respondents who consider themselves to have a disability, also at 68% for those who agreed.
404 people who responded to this question indicated their age. The age groups most inclined to agree with this proposal were the 30-39 = 9% (37); 40-49 = 16% (66); 50-59 = 18% (71); and 60-69 = 14% (55).

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

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The budget mitigates the impact of the Welsh Government Settlement of 3% 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 4.3% plus an additional £1.4m from reserves to help secondary schools deal with attendance issues. Funding for Social Services, Housing and Community Safety has increased by £8.1m or 7.7% plus £6m from specific reserves to help deliver longer term savings strategies.

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.

The draft proposal on the Termination of Neath Canal public access rights agreement has been withdrawn as the legal process will take longer than initially advised

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.

The activities supported by the social services and housing investment proposals will be monitored by a transformation board to ensure they are delivering on the proposed outcomes.

The council will continue to promote and raise awareness of Council Tax Support for those on a low income.

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

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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>

What action will be taken to improve positive or mitigate negative impacts?
<p>The budget seeks to maintain services in 2024/25 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.</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>

There will continue to be close monitoring of homelessness services and also the services provided to those seeking asylum or who are refugees.

4. Community Cohesion/Social Exclusion/Poverty

	Why will it have this impact?
Community Cohesion	There is a sustained oversight of homelessness provision including a remodelling of the housing options service to deliver longer term solutions to the issue of homelessness.
Social Exclusion	See above
Poverty	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.
What action will be taken to improve positive or mitigate negative impacts?	

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Two posts have been established (funded by Shared Prosperity Funding) to champion and promote the council’s tackling poverty agenda. The posts will lead on the development of the council’s policy response to poverty issues and the cost-of-living crisis. The Council also continues to make funding available through Warm Wales to its residents to aid with the cost of living, particularly energy costs and benefits take-up.

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 2024/25 proposed by the Council includes the continuation of increased welfare benefits activity, 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.

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		✓		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. During the consultation the questionnaire asked respondents to indicate what effect they think the Draft Budget 2024/25 proposals will

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			<p>have on people's opportunities to use the Welsh Language (positive and/or adverse). Of those that responded to this question, the majority (65%/291) thought they would have no effect, 4% (18) thought they would have a positive effect, 9% (38) thought they would have a negative effect and 22% (98) 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"> • The importance of keeping the Welsh language and culture alive • Welsh Language should be a positive and encouraged. • The need for more Welsh speakers. • The view that if more funding is given towards sectors which help children and adults e.g. homelessness, learning Welsh would help them get a job. <p>Of those who though they would have a negative effect, the reasons included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the Welsh language must be a priority. • The view that it will affect people's ability to learn Welsh if cuts were made • Concerns that plans to recover full costs from schools would negatively affect their budgets and their ability to deliver the curriculum, including Welsh classes, and extracurricular Welsh activities • The view that learning Welsh isn't high enough in the council's priorities.
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			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comments that there are “Very few Welsh speakers locally” and “money best spent on care etc.”
<p>– treating the Welsh and English languages equally</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 a further increase in 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 2024-25 proposals will have on treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language. Of those that responded to this question, the majority (64%/283) thought they would have no effect, 6% (27) thought they would have a positive effect, 8% (33) thought they would have a negative effect and 22% (98) 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"> • Language rights should be met and supported <p>Of those who though they would have a negative effect, the reasons included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Efforts to increase Welsh usage will cost money.

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			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welsh language services tend to be seen as desirable rather than essential • The Welsh Government has cut its funding for the Welsh Language this year, so further cuts would only do further damage to the language
<p>Developing or revising the draft budget proposals in relation to the Welsh language.</p>			<p>During the consultation, respondents were asked a number of questions on how the proposals could be developed or revised in relation to the Welsh language:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In your opinion, what positive effects would our Draft Budget 2024-25 proposals have on people’s opportunities to use the Welsh language? Comments included: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Speaking your Mother Tongue at any opportunity has to be positive ○ Motivation to use the Welsh language is a personal thing ○ cuts to funding are always going to reduce provision and opportunities to use Welsh • In your opinion, what positive effects would our Draft Budget 2024-25 proposals have on treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language? Comments included: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ As a strategy is already in place treat both languages equally, then the positive effects remain the same ○ The Welsh Language should never be treated less favourably than the English

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				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ This is statutory so it should be protected ● In your opinion, what adverse effects would our Draft Budget 2024-25 proposals have on people’s opportunities to use the Welsh language? Comments included: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ More free Welsh lessons for all to embrace the language ○ Reducing funding to schools and other services would increase their financial burden and adversely affect their ability to develop and deliver Welsh language opportunities. ○ Fewer staff who speak Welsh maybe because of the costs associated with Welsh learning courses ● In your opinion, what adverse effects would our Draft Budget 2024-25 proposals have on treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language? Comments included: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Is there a separate budget for Welsh language training and development for staff of NPT to increase Welsh speakers ○ Non-Welsh speaking people’ might think it’s all a waste of money/there may be more calls to get rid of more and more Welsh things ○ Budget reductions could affect the ability of services to translate public facing documentation etc. ● How do you think the draft budget proposals could be developed or revised so that they would have positive effects, or more positive effects on people’s opportunities to use the Welsh language? Comments included:
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			<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Suggestions that AI chat tools could be used to reduce translation times and give people the chance to access services in Welsh.○ Make the pages of the council website completely Welsh○ Provision of budgets to each service to cover the costs of Welsh translations○ Suggestions for communities of practice to be created, a directory of those who can provide services through Welsh in the county, a Welsh contact point in each key department that can connect with each other <ul style="list-style-type: none">● How do you think the draft budget proposals could be developed or revised so that they would have positive effects, or more positive effects on treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language? Comments included:<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Ensure that someone will be available by phone if a caller wants to communicate in Welsh.○ There may be grants available to pay for training etc. for employees to learn the language and to promote the language in the workplace and society○ Education on attitudes to the Welsh language for everyone <p>How do you think the draft budget proposals could be developed or revised so that they would not have adverse effects, or would have less adverse effects on people's opportunities to use the Welsh language? Comments included:</p>
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				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Search for relevant grants and make use of cheap courses available to increase the number of staff who can speak Welsh. ○ Maybe even call for Welsh speaking volunteers to help in some way which can therefore save money ○ establish partnerships with charities or groups such as Menter Iaith ○ identify key individuals who could contribute to Welsh language activity in communities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● How do you think the draft budget proposals could be developed or revised so that they would not have adverse effects, or would have less adverse effects on treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language? Comments included: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ there are lots of Welsh people or people who have learned the language who might be prepared to volunteer ○ Unless Welsh is spoken more generally in our communities, and supported by an early learning programme in infant, junior and comprehensive education, it won't make any difference ○ We need to prioritise. Arts, language etc are not a priority. Education and housing is a priority ○ The principles of bilingualism and fair play must always be adhered to.
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What action will be taken to improve positive or mitigate negative impacts?

Officers will monitor the implementation of the proposals.

The council published its revised Welsh Language Promotion Strategy in 2023. By working with local organisations, our schools and residents of our many communities we are confident that we will meet the commitments laid out in the strategy to increase the number of Welsh speakers in Neath Port Talbot; Increase the use of Welsh; and create favourable conditions (in terms of infrastructure and context).

Our Welsh in Education Strategic Plan 2022-2032 details how we plan to support and further develop Welsh language education in schools and in our wider communities and how we plan for future growth.

The original proposal for full cost recovery of primary school cleaning is now being phased over a three year period to mitigate the impact on schools.

6. Biodiversity

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

Biodiversity Duty	+	-	+/-	Why will it have this impact?

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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.				Unknown.

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?

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Ways of Working	Details
<p>i. Long term – looking at least 10 years (and up to 25 years) ahead</p>	<p>The Council’s Corporate Plan takes a long term view, backed up by short and medium term proposals. Work has commenced on developing a medium term financial plan to cover the period 2024-2029 which is fully aligned with the Corporate Plan. The MTFP 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 2024/25 financial year in relation to closing this budget gap which will include further invest to save proposals aimed at meeting the needs of our community through different approaches. The budget recognises the need to grow the economy which is seen as fundamental to improving the wellbeing of future generations.</p>
<p>ii. Prevention – preventing problems occurring or getting worse</p>	<p>Proposals increase investment in early intervention and prevention programmes, particularly in social care and housing. The budget also provides £1.4m time limited funding to target support for attendance in our secondary schools, whilst also protecting a wide range of other services that support wellbeing eg indoor leisure services; library services etc</p> <p>The budget strategy seeks to provide stability over 2024/25 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</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>

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services internal or external	The Council will work with partners and the wider community as the budget is implemented
iv. Involvement – involving people, ensuring they reflect the diversity of the population	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.
v. Integration – making connections to maximise contribution to: Council’s wellbeing objectives	<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>
Other public bodies objectives	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.

9. Monitoring Arrangements

Provide information on the monitoring arrangements to:

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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 which will be submitted to Cabinet and the scrutiny committees on a regular basis.

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 £1.4 million is provided to help those struggling to re-engage with their learning.
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
Biodiversity	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.

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Wellbeing of Future Generations Act	<p>The Council has worked hard to strike the right balance in its budget proposals for 2024/25 including the use of £6m from reserves to deliver long term strategic change programmes in adult social care and the homelessness service.</p> <p>There is a strong emphasis on growing the economy and a clear commitment to strengthening the Council's work in responding to the nature and climate emergencies.</p> <p>.</p>
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Overall Conclusion

<p>The budget seeks to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Enable the Council to continue to deliver its Corporate Plan• Enable the Council to engage with investors• Deliver local and WG policy priorities• Sustain the Council <p>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.</p>

11. Actions

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

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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 21 st December 2023 and 10 th January 2024	<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, Cabinet Scrutiny and Council
Present final budget proposals to Cabinet	Corporate Directors Team	6 th March 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approval of a budget for 2024/25
Present final proposals to Council	Cabinet	7 th March 2024	<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 2024/25	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expenditure contained within cash limits