

REVENUE BUDGET 2022 - 2025

CONSULTATION REPORT

FEBRUARY 2022

carmarthenshire.gov.uk

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INTRODUCTION

A mixed-methods approach to ascertaining views on the 2022-25 budget took place during the period from 17th January 2021 to 6th February 2021.

In making savings, the Council is concerned to minimise the impact upon service delivery. In meeting the challenge of saving a total of £11.7 million, many savings are being made through internal efficiencies and ensuring that the three-year savings which were agreed on in the 2021 budget are delivered. No new saving proposals were put forward this year and therefore local residents, businesses, community and voluntary organisations were asked to have their say on the draft budget so that councillors can consider your feedback before making a final decision in March.

We have a legal responsibility to set a balanced budget every year, ensuring that income from sources such as Council Tax, revenue from paid-for services and grants is enough to cover our expenditure. With Covid-19 having had a continued impact on services, this year councillors face the added pressure of funding extra costs incurred and ensuring future contingencies can be met. Pressures are being particularly felt across social care services because of the pandemic combined with national staffing issues.

There are a variety of legal and policy reasons why the Council must undertake full and meaningful consultation, where service changes are under consideration.¹ Ultimately, a flawed approach can be a means whereby decisions can be challenged through the courts, through a process of Judicial Review. A decision against the Council would prevent the saving being delivered, as well as damage the reputation of Council, at a time when it needs to focus on responding to a challenging financial position.

This report:

1. Outlines the **consultation approach** and the different consultation methods deployed;
2. Describes the **demographic characteristics** of those who took part
3. Summarises the **key findings**;
4. Collates **minutes of meeting** in which the budget was discussed

1) OUTLINE OF APPROACH AND CONSULTATION METHODS

Whilst the settlement provided by Welsh Government was much more favourable than expected, inflation, rising costs, demographic pressures and increased statutory obligations have challenged the Council to make significant cost reductions. No new savings proposals are being put forward for consultation this year, however the council's Executive Board has reiterated its commitment to delivering the three-year savings agreed in the 2021 budget. We invited local residents, businesses, and

¹ The 2010 Equality Act and the Council's Strategic Equality Plan require that 'due regard' be given to the views of designated groups in making decisions. In terms of consultation, a body of case law points to the need for public authorities to properly gather and consider the views of the public in reaching decisions.

community and voluntary organisations - to have a say on our draft budget so that councillors can consider your feedback before making a final decision.

Councillor involvement

A series of departmental seminars for all county councillors took place over a 5-day period: 17th January 2022 to 21st January 2022.² All efficiencies across each department were considered in detail and feedback sought. Bullet points of the key discussion points are provided in appendix a.

Alongside councillor engagement, public consultation took place in the following ways:

Survey

The survey asked respondents on their views on the draft budget. A full draft report was provided alongside saving proposals and pressures in order to inform respondents to ensure that they could express a view on the budget report. Respondents were asked about their overall thoughts of the draft budget, areas to which they disagreed, areas of the report which they supported. Moreover, respondents were asked how much of an increase in Council tax they would be willing to accept.

The survey was administered electronically via the Council's online consultation page on the website. A total of **170 responses** were received from various sections of the community, including individuals, businesses, town and community councils and groups and organisations. A demographic breakdown is provided in section 2.

Other [Email responses received]

8 emails were submitted to the Council during the budget consultation period. A summary of the contents of the emails are provided below:

- The majority of the emails received voiced their concerns and disapproval of introducing car parking fees in Burry Port, Kidwelly and Ferryside. Many of the emails received noted that this would have a significant impact on the footfall and prosperity of these areas. Additionally, emails note that it would encourage people to park illegally which would increase congestion and potentially be more dangerous to all road users and pedestrians. Respondents are also concerned that this will drive customers and tourists away to areas where they can shop and park for free.

Social Media Responses:

In order to raise publicity, social media was utilised to encourage residents to complete the online survey. Some provided comments on Facebook and Twitter can be seen below:

- Some indicated that the rate of Council tax increase exceeds the rate of inflation, which is putting some households into financial difficulty, especially due to the proposed increase in NI and utility bills.
- Some noted that there is a need to reduce wages for senior officers and councillors instead of increasing council tax.
- Others noted that they see the exercise as 'pointless' as they feel their comments are not listened to.

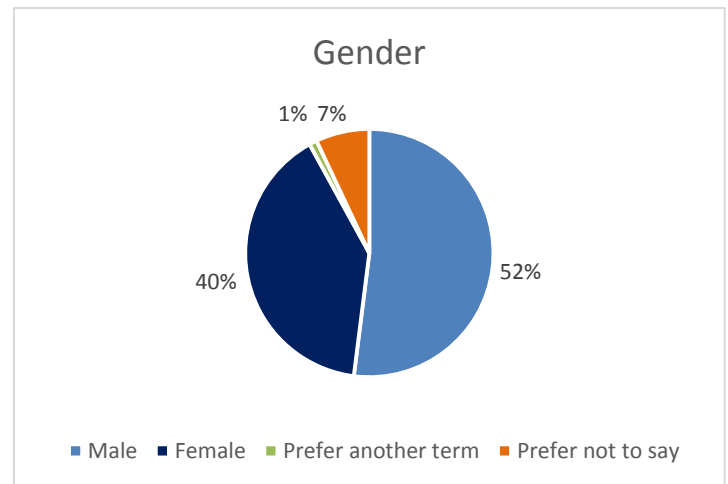
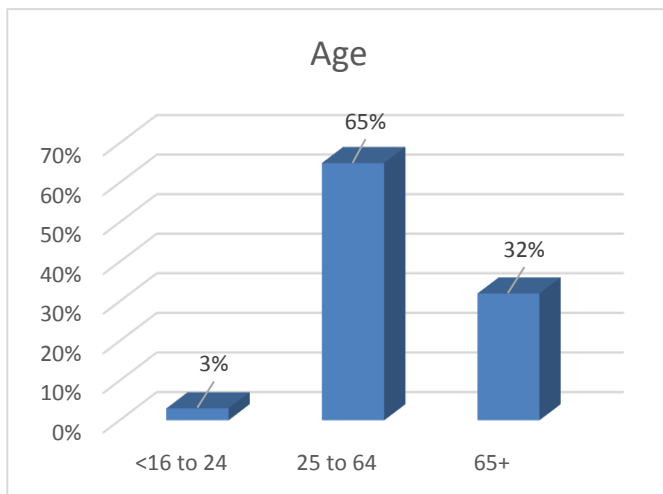
² As democratically elected representatives, councillor views are of central importance. This is of course in addition to their decision making role, as Council, in deciding the budget.

Publicity

Local and regional press and local radio advertisements were used to inform the public how to become involved and obtain further information on the budget consultation. Carmarthenshire County council staff were also encouraged to take part in the Budget consultation via internal newsletter. In addition, the consultation was publicised through relevant equality groups, including Equality Carmarthenshire, Ageing well Forum and the Carmarthenshire Disability Coalition for Action. The Carmarthenshire Community and Town Council Liaison Forum held a specific meeting to discuss the budget and were asked to respond via the online survey with the consultation information also circulated to all clerks in the Community and Town Council newsletter. All Town and Community Councils were asked to take part using the online consultation. The public consultation phase ran from 17th January 2021 to 6th February 2022. In total, 170 responses were received.

2) RESPONDENT PROFILE

Of the 147 respondents who gave completed answers to demographic questions: 97% were from individuals and 3% from Town and Community Councils, organisations or businesses.³



Demographic Characteristic	Overall %
Transgender	10.3%
PNTS	11.0%
Relationship status	
Single	13.2%
Married	60.4%
Separated/ Divorced	5.6%
Widowed	3.5%
PNTS	13.5%
Sexual orientation	
Straight	78.9%
LGB	2.5%
PNTS	17.6%
Religion	
Yes	44.6%
PNTS	14.9%
Pregnancy/maternity & paternity	
Pregnancy	1.6%
Maternity/Paternity	1.7%
Caring responsibilities	
Yes	21.0%
PNTS	8.4%

Demographic Characteristic	Overall %
Ethnicity	
White	88.1%
BME	0.7%
Other	0.7%
PNTS	10.5%
Disability	
Yes	17.8%
No	73.3%
PNTS	8.5%
Preferred language	
Welsh	10.7%
English	92.1%
Other	0.7%
Income	
<£15,000	14.7%
£15,001 – £30,000	31.5%
£30,001 – £45,000	17.5%
Over £45,000	16.8%
PNTS	19.6%
Royal forces	
Yes	13.5%
PNTS	5.7%

³ Carmarthenshire Local Access Forum, Unspecified hotel operator

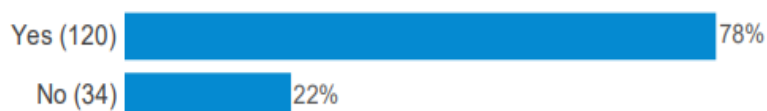
A total of 120 respondents included their post codes. These are presented in the table below.

Area	SA4	SA14	SA15	SA16	SA17	SA18	SA19	SA20	SA31	SA32	SA33	SA34	SA39	SA40	SA44
Number of Responses	2	21	20	11	7	11	7	1	16	6	10	2	1	2	2
% Responses	1.5%	16.2%	15.4%	8.5%	5.4%	8.5%	5.4%	0.8%	12.3%	4.6%	7.7%	1.5%	0.8%	1.5%	1.5%

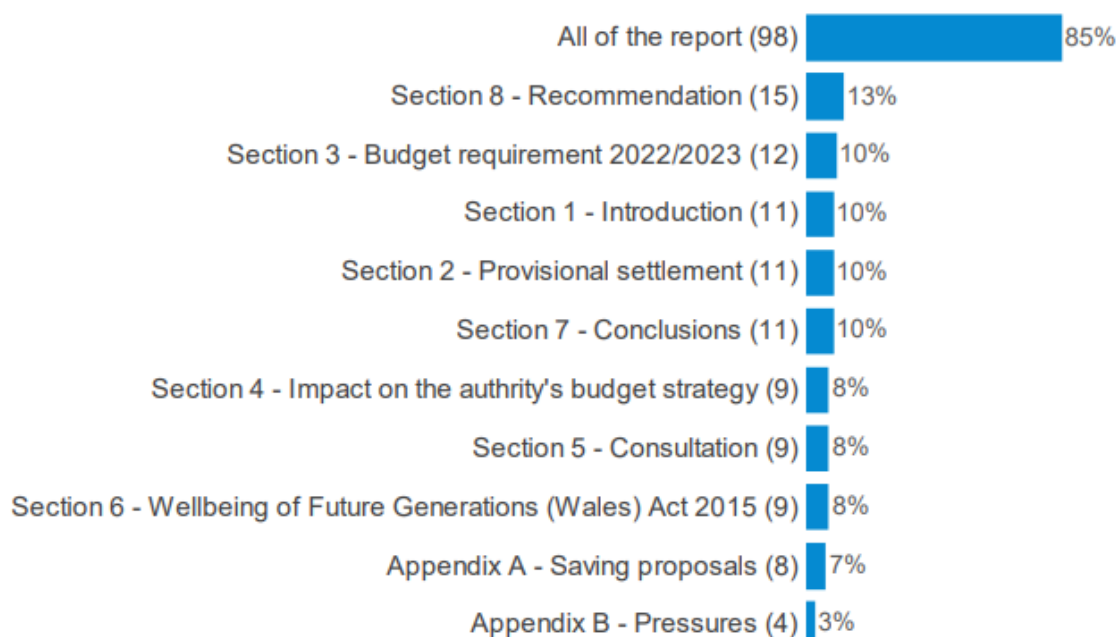
3) CONSULTATION FINDINGS

Each question of the consultation is examined in turn and is presented below. Respondents were asked to provide their overall opinions of the draft budget report, their feedback on what they disagree with and their opinion of what they supported in the draft budget. An inductive thematic analysis was adopted to analyse the free-text responses. This method involves a six-step process of familiarisation, coding, generating themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes followed by the writing up stage. Thematic analysis is an effective approach when ascertaining people's views, knowledge, opinions, and experiences. Moreover, an inductive approach has been adopted to determining themes which have emerged from the data.

Have you read the budget report 2022-2025?



What section of the report have you read?



Q1. What are your thoughts on the proposed budget for 2022-2025?

A total of 116 respondents took the opportunity to provide their overall thoughts on the draft budget. These comments have been categorised into 4 key themes which can be seen below, and examples of comments can be seen for each theme.

- 1) No increase / minimal increase in council tax – A common theme which emerged from the data relates to reducing the proposed increase on their council tax due to the increased cost of living. Many expressed concerns regarding the proposed increase in National insurance contributions and soaring gas and electricity bills.
 - *Cost of living is currently out of control, especially of energy costs. The knock on affect to this is all other costs, especially food will increase. As a civil servant - no pay rise for 2021-2022, including no or capped pay rises since 2008. Each year the council tax goes up towards 4-5%. Based on previous inflation rates, these rises have been above/double the rates. This year the proposal is 4.4% - I do not see a better service for the rises that have been made in the past or expect in the present financial year...*
 - *I consider any increase to council tax to be a harsh difficulty to those of us on very limited incomes, especially when I already have to ration food and heating.*
 - *I disagree on the fact that you have left over cash but yet will increase 4.4 increase and yet we have suffered with covid and now we have increased gas and electric bills*
 - *I don't think the rising cost of living has been considered enough.*
- 2) Negative overall view of the budget report – A common theme which emerged was a negative overall view. The negative views centre around the lack of detail provided and the complexity of the information given. Moreover, some indicated that they disagree with the budget but did not provide further detail on what they disagreed with.
 - *Difficult to follow due to many acronyms. No details on savings on outside consultancy costs. No details of increase of councillors costs and benefits. Could be room for improvement.*
 - *It doesn't make much sense to me*
 - *It is a far to detailed document for most lay people to understand and to make educated comments on. I will just give answers in the survey that I feel are relevant.*
 - *It is complicated.*
- 3) Limited use of services – Some respondents indicated as they do not use 'many services' provided by the council; they feel that it is unfair that they are required to pay the same amount as other Carmarthenshire residents who utilise more services.
 - *We do not use the schools in Carmarthenshire, therefore the council tax should be reduced for services we do not use.*
 - *Why should I be paying more council tax when the services provided are nowhere near as good*

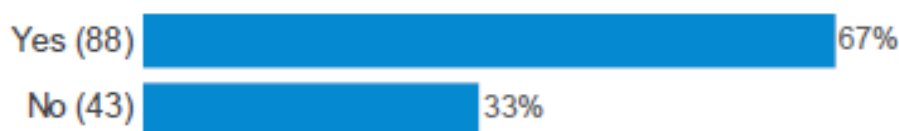
- *Seems to me that council tax is always increasing but services stay the same or get worse*
- *For my household we are getting very little. We have no Children, no bus service, no library, no help with our bills (as we worked all our lives). ALL WE GET IS A RUBBISH COLLECTION and gritters when not on strike.*

4) Some specific views on services – Some respondents took the opportunity to raise concerns over specific aspects of the budget. Specifically, some residents indicated that some services need to be protected such as; parking in smaller towns in the county, additional need for street cleaning, needing additional funding for children services and improved health and wellbeing facilities. Examples of the comments are presented below:

- *I strongly disagree with the proposal to install parking meters in the car park at Seaview Terrace Burry Port. This would have a devastating impact on local businesses and the local economy. This area is popular with visitors to the harbour and beaches as well as the local shops and people will be obliged to shop elsewhere or park cars on our already congested roads. The huge number of residents from new properties in the area are having an impact on our services and need parking facilities to support our local economy. Burry Port is being congested to an unacceptable level with no consideration for the well-being of us residents,*
- *Ludicrous! Hammering small businesses and town centres AGAIN with yet MORE parking fees. Current free parking periods LAUGHABLE. Why not offer Parking Discs?*
- *More money on street cleaning*
- *More needed for frontline; extracurricular activities for children; and social care*
- *Re provisions for children - aim to improve health / social activities does not recognise impact of Covid 19. Can only speak for children under 2. No provision available for activities / access to health visitors. Covid 19 has isolated new parents - no baby/toddler groups. Can't even access leisure pool at reasonable times. How can a parent keep a child active and healthy without any group activities, access to leisure activities or medical assistance?*
- *There should be a significant funding allocation to children education. Parents and children should be asked they need to make up for lost time. There are very few extracurricular activities, certainly nowhere near pre-pandemic.*
- *A lot detail but no real information how this will include sports and leisure, there is mention of obesity, well being and mental health, but no mention on improving sporting facilities in deprived areas?*
- *Although decarbonisation is mentioned I believe that the council needs to be more specific in what it proposes to do given the very short time available to make significant reductions, is solar panels on every building, electric vehicle adoption, non-fossil fuel heating,*

Q2.

Is there any part of the budget report you disagree with?



A total 131 responses were received for the question displayed above. As pictured in the bar chart 33% (n=43) did not disagree with the draft budget. Whilst the data indicates that 67% (n=88) disagreed with an aspect of the draft budget report.

Respondents who disagreed were given an opportunity to provide a brief description of which aspect they disagree with and provide an explanation why.

Q3. Please provide a brief description below of what you disagree with and why.

A total of 87 respondents took the opportunity to express disagreement with the draft budget. These comments have been categorised into 4 key themes which are presented below.

- 1) Increasing Council tax when services have been reduced – The vast majority of the comments (89%) related to Council tax increases. Many expressed that there should be no increase in Council tax due to household financial pressures as a consequence of the proposed increase in National insurance and energy bills.
 - *Council tax increase percentage*
 - *council tax increase we are all having a difficult time with household living and cost this is not expected. People want to know what the extra money is to be spend on. this is unfair and councillors should not be supporting the increase its not fair. Money is being saved with staff at home and not in the office.*
 - *Council tax increases based on an assumption of demand / need for services.*
 - *Council tax increases. There are potholes and dog mess everywhere along with drug paraphernalia. We see very little in terms of services now and to increase when many have fallen on hard times financially is absolutely abhorrent.*
 - *Council tax is high enough already*
 - *council tax rises too high*
 - *Council tax rises.*
- 2) Not enough detail - Some noted that there is insufficient information to make an informed decision on savings. Some indicated that the report was difficult to read with jargonistic text. Additionally, some respondents indicated that there was a lack of detail on efficiency proposals.
 - *Efficiency proposals unclear.*

- *It is not written in an easy to understand way. The appendices are written as a business case. This makes it difficult for anyone to relate the contents to real life. It does not answer the “so what does that mean to me question”*
 - *Lack of detail on savings.*
 - *No clarity about your efficiency proposals. The report is also very jargonistic hence difficult for the lay person to understand. I am educated to masters level and struggled to understand the detail.*
- 3) **Parking charges** – Some noted that parking charges should not be increased. Additionally, parking facilities in smaller towns and villages should be free to increase footfall.
- *Introduction of parking charges to new car parks will disadvantage small shops and businesses in favour of retail parks. This risks localities, including villages like Dafen, which has recently had new parking restrictions imposed on the high street losing services such as corner shops, pharmacies and post offices. Additionally, residents in high streets using these car parks will park in neighbouring streets to save money, increasing congestion in those other areas. Increasing car parking charges at other car parks including coastal car parks may also deter people from using them.*
 - *Increases in parking charges, drives consumers away from the town centre, coastal car parks will become too expensive for the locals to visit.*
- 4) **Some specific views on services** – Some respondents took the opportunity to raise concerns over specific aspects of the budget. Specifically, closing observation and assessment centres, reactive maintenance and rationalising the number of schools were noted by respondents. Examples of the comments are presented below:
- *Closing Observation and Assessment Centres would have a huge impact on schools. There are times when pupils cause huge disruption in classes which in turn affects the amount and quality of teaching for the rest of the pupils. These highly disruptive pupils should not be in mainstream schools.*
 - *I think some of the savings proposed are short-sighted -particularly regarding areas where maintenance is to be stopped in favour of reactive repairs. Non maintenance usually results in avoidable bigger problems which are more difficult and costly to repair and can have a major impact on the lives of service users. I hope that maintenance of housing stock does not fall into this category.*
 - *Rationalize the number of schools in 2023/24 and 2024/25. There is no clarity here as to how this will be implemented. School closures will have a huge impact on communities, Welsh language, culture, economy and environment.*

Q4.

Is there any part of the budget report you support?



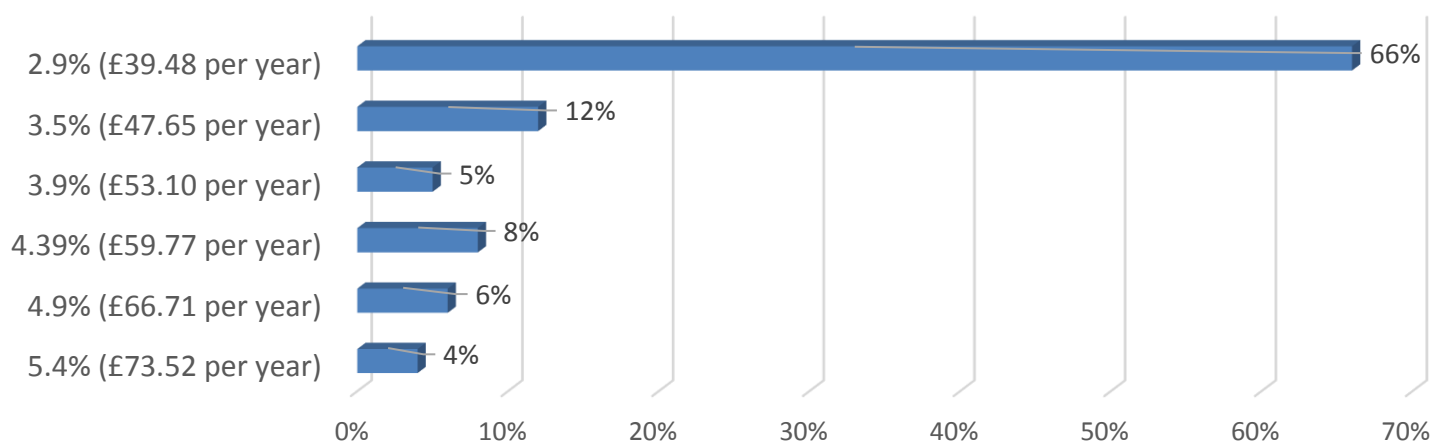
In total, 123 respondents gave a response to the question above. As the bar graph illustrates, 61% (n= 75) of the respondents did not support any aspects of the draft budget. In contrast, 39% (n=48) supported some aspect of the proposed budget. Respondents who agreed were given an opportunity to provide a brief description of which aspect of the budget they support and provide an explanation why.

Q5. Please provide a brief description below of the section(s) of the report you support and tell us why.

42 respondents took the opportunity to express their support for the proposed budget which have been categorised into 2 key themes which are presented below.

- 1) Increase in net-carbon zero funding – The majority of respondents support the investment in ensuring that targets are met in the net-carbon zero agenda. This includes improving recycling provision in the county.
 - *Acceleration of decarbonisation*
 - *'green' initiatives. Just about OK to pay a bit more council tax if we keep to these things!*
 - *Decarbonisation programme*
 - *Improved kerbside recycling facilities such as glass collection*
 - *The part use of the current year underspend to tackle decarbonisation and the objectives listed in support of the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. I want to live in a fairer community where we look after those who need help without making judgements.*
- 2) Efficiencies in back office and management – Some noted that they welcome proposals to examine efficiencies in management of back-office processes.
 - *Efficiencies within management*
 - *efficiency savings in admin processes and paperwork.*
 - *Overall aims to improve efficiency and cut costs are welcomed to a degree but not at long term cost.*
- 3) Additional funding to education and child services - Some respondents welcomed the proposals to increase teachers wage and increase funding to education and child services.
 - *Ensuring school budgets are protected.*
 - *Monies to support children & young people in education.*
 - *More funds for education*

Q5. How much of an increase in Council tax you would be willing to accept? (£ increase per year is calculated based on a Band D property)



Respondents were informed that Council Tax raises around £89 million a year which represents around a quarter of Carmarthenshire County Council's total budget. Respondents were also notified that the current budget projections were based on a proposed council tax increase of 4.4%. Participants were asked to indicate how much of an increase in Council tax they would be willing to accept between 2.9% and 5.4%. As pictured in the bar chart above, two thirds (66%; n=95) of respondents opted for the lowest increase of 2.9% to their Council tax. This supports comments made regarding respondents apprehensions around the increase in the cost of living. The second highest percentage increase accepted by respondents was 3.5% which equated to 12% (n=17) of all responses. Only 8% of respondents favoured the proposed 4.39% council tax increase.

4) NOTES FROM BUDGET CONSULTATION MEETINGS

Schools Strategy Budget Forum – 24th January 2022

Provisional Welsh Government Settlement and Draft Budget Proposals

RH shared a PowerPoint presentation discussing the revenue budget. This included:

- Next year's budget assumptions have been amended to allow for 4% expenditure inflation, 4% pay award and funding provided for employers NI increase of 1.25%
- Settlement is higher than it has been for the last 12 years, as is the validation and growth.
- To date Carmarthenshire have claimed more than £50million from WG for Covid. WG have now said to LA's need to accommodate any ongoing Covid expenditure. This is the single biggest risk of uncertainty in next year's budget.
- The ALN grant has doubled to £14million across Wales – this is an additional £400,000 for CCC.
- There is a total ECS increase of over £11million which is the second largest increase across the Council.

RH summarised that Covid is the biggest risk to next year's budget. AT added the settlement is a significant risk and grant money doesn't allow secure planning for the next 2 years. There are Covid pressures which are unavoidable and CCC can't be sure how they will pan out.

TS questioned whether the end of Covid hardship funding would mean schools are expected to cover the costs for all Covid cleaning and face coverings? RH informed that this is a concern which has been escalated to Corporate Management Team (CMT) via Chris Moore. There are many services around the Authority who will be impacted, and decisions need to be made asap. RH informed, if WG state that face coverings are required and expected to be provided, WG will have to provide funding. GM added this issue is already being discussed by CMT, particularly the aspect of school cleaning which is on the RA for all schools. A decision needs to be made if this is to continue over the summer term and the impact on schools if it cannot continue. TS stated she doesn't want to make school staff feel insecure now that they are settled into routine with the current cleaning regime and is concerned over what will happen should schools need to cover costs. SN reminded that the current term includes one week in April which will be included in the next financial year. AT stated we must await guidance from WG but is on the CMT radar.

GE questioned that it is stated there is no savings targets for schools in 2022/2023 but the presentation shows school delegating budget savings target for 2023/2024. GM informed these are efficiency savings from premises costs and potential school closures. Which may create a knock-on effect on closure of schools to the department which has been incorporated into the budget.

RH shared a PowerPoint presentation discussing the capital budget. This included WG capital settlement will drop to £1.8million which presents a challenge for the next year. There has been no addition to the MEP capital budget as the review is being undertaken. Cabinet have agreed for £500,000 to accelerate decarbonisation budget 2022/2023 with WG funding from 2023/2024.

PJ raised the issue of energy conservation and sustainability within schools. There has been significant investment across the estate which has put forward energy efficient measures, but schools are struggling to meet these within a reasonable timeframe. PJ suggested, as Bryngwyn is having new roof, this could be an appropriate time to act on measures such as solar panels etc.

AH raised an issue with the energy efficiency and refit scheme within his school. It is felt that works have ground to a halt in the school. He has refrained from replacing some things such as strip lighting in the main hall as they were expected to be part of the refit scheme, but no update has been provided on timescale. Some work has been done; other works expected are yet to be carried out.

Corporate Employee Relations Forum (CERF) Meeting 28th JANUARY 2022

Chair welcomed all present to the Budget Consultation Meeting.

On behalf of the TUs, ME pointed out, with due respect to RH, the TUs did not consider the consultation as a proper budget consultation due to Councillors not being present to discuss the consultation with the TU representatives. TUs felt, the decisions were political decisions and would be made publicly.

It was mentioned, the requirement for a TU strategy with the inclusion of consultation, be discussed next month by CEX, Leader and PT.

RH informed, feedback from the following be submitted to Cabinet for their attention.

- Public Consultation
- TUs
- Members Seminars
- Formal Scrutiny meetings
- Town and Community Council Forum

RH explained, this year, the overarching message being, there has been a significant expansion in the budget for 2022 and the Welsh Government settlement had been positive, but this was due to the inflation rate, pay and areas which the Local Authority needed to fund.

RH shared his screen and provided the Forum with a bilingual power point presentation, in relation to the 2022 Budget Consultation.

RH provided an update on the following powerpoint slides / headings :-

- Background information
- Settlement Compared to Pressures
- Moving Forward
- Hardship Claims
 - To date over £50m had been claimed.
 - Scheme to terminate end of March 2022.
 - Required to factor any additional costs or lost income which continued to be ongoing, into next year's budget.

- Last year the Local Authority had £1½million for specific social care contingency and £1m general budgetary contingency where it was required.
- Proposing for next year's budget a total of £3½m of contingency to support where required.
- Provisional Settlement
 - Indicative figures being: Y2 (3.5%) and Y3 (2.4%)
 - The Additional Learning Needs £7m grant has been maintained and has doubled to £14m for 2023. Potentially £400k to be delegated to schools budget for ALNs.
 - RRRS Education Grant to be increased to £35m and to continue into 2023 with an extra £2m to be provided to school budgets.
 - Further grants to be confirmed by WG in final settlement.
- Current Validation Assumptions
 - CPI was 5.1% but has risen to 5.4% with the expectation to decline by end of 2022.
 - Inflation applied to charges and fees whereby Cabinet have maintained the 2½% due to the impact on household finances
 - Initial pressures bids has extended over £30m from departments.
 - There are pressures within commissioned care pay.
 - Had to allow an additional £1m for energy costs.
- NJC & Teachers Pay
- Proposed Financial Model
 - 2022/23 budget being £386m
 - 2023/24 budget being £417.8m. (£311m received from WG and £106m raised in C. Tax).
- Departmental Proposals
 - Services continue to work through the pandemic's response/recovery mode
- Medium Term Financial Plan
- Capital
 - WG Capital Settlement has declined to £1.8m for 2023.
 - Decarbonisation Funding – Cabinet proposing to fund £½m due to WG not issuing the funding until 2023/2024.
- Capital Programme
 - Over £269m being the total capital programme from 2022 to 2027 (ie. £150m being external funding and £119m being the Organisation's funding).
- Considerations / Risks
- Budget Setting Timetable
 - 21st February – Cabinet
 - 1st March – Final settlement to be received from WG
 - 2nd March – Council budget
 - 9th March – Council Tax setting

PT thanked RH for his logic and comprehensive presentation and notified, there was no differentiation between the Members' presentation and the presentation the Forum had been presented with.

The bilingual presentation slide pack to be circulated to the TUs.

The following had been raised as follows:-

PH – “What is the total increase in grant funding”?

RH – 9.2% being the total increase in grant funding.

PH – “Is the 9.2% across the Board”?

RH – The 9.2% uplift was for Revenue and equated to approximately £27m. Capital last year was £12m and had declined to £10m for this year. (Capital was the £1.8m reduction).

PH – “Capital – there are lots of external funding to come into it therefore it would pay for it”

RH – The Local Authority endeavours to utilise the annual allocations from WG and have acknowledged the loss of the £1.8m but required to establish on how the Local Authority will balance the capital programme over the forthcoming years.

PH – “Revenue – How much will the total revenue and % budget for Carmarthenshire be, over the next 3 years”?

RH – This year’s budget being £386m, £418m proposed for next year, therefore the savings equated to approximately 1% of the net budget.

PH – “(Funding for the living wage of Commissioned Care Services)

“Does the Local Authority’s procurement and commissioning service have the ability to enforce the issue of the possibility of private care providers obtaining the funding”?

RH confirmed, he had not seen the legislation/legal commitment.

ACTION: Helen Pugh, Head of Revenues and Financial Compliance to be invited to a future CERF meeting to discuss ethical procurement.

ME stated as follows:

- If cuts had not been made by the LA, we wouldn’t be in this position now.
- Considered reducing the transport costs as wealth transfusion.
- Proposing to the LA, to implement a needs led no cuts budget that met the needs of the employees and service users.
- To freeze Council Tax.
- TUs required to speak to elected political leadership in order for their views to be heard. (RH explained that meeting discussion points were fed back and formed part of the consultation report considered by cabinet/full council)
- LA to demand WG for the £120m to be returned to the LA. TUs to campaign on that basis.
- Services which were being provided by private companies should be brought back in-house eg. domiciliary care.
- The identified efficiencies will affect service areas.
- There is a lot of waste within the LA because of lack of planning.
- There is still potential for income generation but due to previous cuts, the Local Authority have limited their ability to undertake that.
- Media to be notified regarding the political leadership of the Local Authority.

PT – “If the Local Authority were to disapply the Council Tax increase and budget targets for 2023, how much would that be ?

RH – £3.8m is the figure for savings and £4m Council Tax, therefore if no cuts then Council Tax would need to become approx. 8% and to freeze Council Tax to balance

the budget, the Local Authority would have to find £8m of savings and not £4m. If both were to be applied, there would be a budget gap of £8m, leading to an unbalanced (i.e. illegal) budget

AC stated as follows:-

- How can it be cheaper for work to be provided to other companies who were expected to make a profit when the Local Authority have management structures who can provide the service(s) within the Local Authority.
- Hoped the Local Authority would now be recruiting more people and be able to see there is money to be saved without making cuts to employee's income with regards to services being provided by the Local Authority rather than be extended to private companies.

JJ stated as follows:-

- Living wage required to be increased.
- Envisaging shortfall within the care sector whereby employees may join the private sector due to salaries being higher.
- Private sector work required to be in-house.

PH – Council Tax - “The 3.4% seemed a lower projection as in previous years, what is the reason for that”?

RH – The modelled council tax increase for Yr 2 was 3.4% and Yr 3 3.4% and was based on what the Local Authority required to raise to balance the budget. As forecasted, inflation to decrease towards the end of 2022 (this is an assumption only). New Member administration to set the budget beginning of 2023.

PH - “Regarding the expectance of growth from income resources, does that factor in the verified rates of inflation eg. car parking charges and is the Local Authority looking at the next 2/3 years or expecting it to be below”?

RH – The assumption is to revert back. Bank of England have a target of maintaining CPI inflation at 2% and the economic recovery was judged more important than inflation and therefore allowed inflation to rise in order to support the COVID recovery.

PH – “In terms of the projections for growth ie. the fees and charges is the Local Authority basing it on this year or basing it on pre-COVID”?

RH – Part of the £3½m COVID contingency for 2023 had been acknowledged, that we have to provide support to individual budgets for the loss of income though the scale and longevity of this is highly uncertain.

Consultation ends 4th of February and as part of the consultation process, the TUs feedback to be provided to Cabinet.

5) MINUTES OF SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETINGS

ENVIRONMENTAL & PUBLIC PROTECTION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The Committee considered the report presented by the Cabinet Member for Resources on the Council's Revenue Budget Strategy 2022/23 to 2024/25, as endorsed by the Cabinet for consultation purposes at its meeting held on the 17th January 2022. The report provided Members with the current view of the Revenue Budget for 2022/2023 together with indicative figures for the 2023/2024 and 2024/2025 financial years based on officers' projections of spending requirements and taken account of the provisional settlement issued by Welsh Government on the 21st December 2021. It also reflected current departmental submissions for savings proposals after taking account of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the delivery of those savings.

The Cabinet Member advised that the provisional settlement from Welsh Government this year was considerably higher than what was planned for, however he also highlighted that the scale of expenditure pressures that this Authority and other Local Authorities were facing was also at an unprecedented high level, which offset the higher settlement. The provisional settlement represented an average increase of 9.4% across Wales on the 2021/22 settlement. Carmarthenshire's settlement figures saw an increase of 9.2% (£26.335m) thereby taking the Aggregate External Finance to £311.957m for 2022/23 which included £302k in respect of the Social Care Workforce Grant.

Across the whole of the council's budgets, validation added £23m, by some margin the highest we have needed to allow for in recent years.

The budget also included £12.5m. for new departmental expenditure pressures which have been identified by departments and were inescapable if we are to continue to deliver our main services at the current level. As with the inflationary uplift, this was considerably more than the norm and reflected the scale of pressures on the current Council's services.

In respect of the savings proposals (Appendix Aii), the Cabinet Member explained that the continued response to the pandemic had further impacted on the delivery of efficiencies.

Nevertheless, it was highlighted that the Councils budget strategy had put forward some £3.8m of savings next year and a further £7.9m over the following 2 years. In relation to this committee's remit, the current proposals totalled some £886k in year 1 and a further £1.6m over the following 2 years.

The Budget Strategy proposed a Council Tax of 4.39% for 2022/23, in line with the Medium-Term Financial Plan, and that proposal would be considered as part of the budget finalisation process over the next month and where the Authority received further clarification on cost and grant funding with a view to limiting the Council Tax increase as far as possible. Final budget proposals would then be presented to the Cabinet late February, to ensure a balanced budget was presented to County Council.

The Committee thereupon considered the following detailed budget information appended to the Strategy relevant to its remit:

Appendix A(i) – Efficiency summary for the Environment and Public Protection Services

Appendix A(ii) – Growth Pressures summary for the Environment and Public Protection Services

Appendix B – Budget monitoring report for the Environment and Public Protection Services

Appendix C – Charging Digest for the Environment and Public Protection Services

The following questions/issues were raised on the report:-

The following queries and concerns were raised in regard to car parking charges and the proposal to introduce charges to additional car parks as cited on Appendix Aii of the report:-

It was asked which ‘additional carparks’ had been identified, where were they located, what the process to introduce the charges would be and would Members be made aware?

It was asked consideration had been given to the reasons why the car parks were currently free to use?

A concern was raised in regard to the overall increase of car parking charges and the potential impact on the smaller towns and businesses therein.

The Head of Highway and Transportation, in response stated that the proposal to introduce charges to additional carparks would involve the carparks which were currently free to use:-

- Dafen Steele, Llanelli
- Llanybydder
- Station Car Park and Sea View Terrace, Burry Port
- Glan-yr-Afon and Station Road Car Parks, Kidwelly
- Llansteffan
- Eva Terrace, Ferryside

In terms of the due process, it was explained that subject to the approval of the budget strategy, to enable the charges to be applied a lengthy statutory process for the creation of a Traffic Regulation Order would take place. As part of this process the proposed Traffic Regulation Order which would be subject to a formal stakeholder consultation and public notices.

The Head of Highway and Transportation confirmed that the reasons behind the current use of free car parks had been explored and was factored into the current proposal.

In relation to the general increase in car park charges, the Head of Waste and Environmental Services highlighted that as stated in the report, the increase was planned for April 2020 but was put into effect in January 2021 and that there was no proposal within this budget strategy to further increase the charges.

Contrary to the concerns regarding the increase in car park charges, a comment was raised that whilst any increase in charges was controversial in its nature, it was highlighted that there were also many members of the public who do not own vehicles,

of which would not be affected by the increase in charges but would be affected by any increase in Council Tax.

It was raised that the carpark charges within the town of Carmarthen were substantially higher than those within Ammanford and Llanelli, in the interest of fairness, it was asked if a review of the carpark charges across Carmarthenshire could be undertaken with a view to be consistent. The Head of Waste and Environmental Services stated that the comment would be considered, however the variance in terms of the location and usage would be a factor in the different charging rate. In addition, Members were informed that the charges were an important income stream to enable necessary maintenance on the carparks to be undertaken.

Further comments were raised regarding the economic situation and footfall which differed between Ammanford, Llanelli and Carmarthen and the reason why the carpark charges within Ammanford and Llandeilo was at a lower rate due to the economic position. Concern was raised that an increase in carpark charges would have a detrimental impact on the smaller towns and its businesses.

A concern was raised in relation to the lack of maintenance and aesthetic care of the infrastructure and fixtures within Ammanford and the need for a plan to manage this was called for. In response, the Head of Waste and Environmental Services explained that the budget strategy had included the financial position and the proposals for members consideration and unfortunately this area of maintenance was no longer available.

In reference to Road Safety Innovation, clarification was sought how income and sponsorship would be obtained. The Head of Highways and Transportation explained that in exploring how additional income could be obtained, the team had discovered examples across the Country where road safety activities had attracted sponsorship. It was identified that there was a potential opportunity to achieve a modest income by utilising services such as school crossing patrols and training.

Reference was made to the proposal in relation to Highways - 'subject to the financial position remaining unchanged the service will be forced to further reduce the level of general maintenance work' as stated in Appendix Aii of the report. In acknowledging that the condition of the highways was currently dependant on the continued significant investment bids, strong concern was expressed that further budget reductions would be detrimental to the road conditions within Carmarthenshire. Following the general consensus of the Committee to protect the maintenance and improve the conditions of the County's highways, it was therefore recommended to place the allocated sum of £757k within highways budget.

Information was sought in respect of the School Crossing Patrol vacancies and the timescales. The Head of Highways and Transportation reported that the explained that whilst a continuous recruitment process for School Crossing Patrols was in effect, there had been some difficulties in filling vacancies on some sites. In the interim, the team were working with the Community to assist in the provision of school crossing.

In response to a query raised regarding the vacant post within the Public Rights of Way section, the Head of Highways and Transportation reported that the first round of the recruitment process had been completed and would be appointing shortly.

Reference was made to the Traffic Management section of the Charging Digest, Appendix C. It was asked if the 2% price increase in line with inflation could be further increased? The Cabinet Member for Resources explained that as stated within the report, the charging would be minimised to 2.5% in respect of the burden on household budgets. It was further commented that an increase within the Traffic Management section would not have a direct impact on households. In acknowledging that income was an important and necessary stream, the comment on the percentage price increase was echoed and supported as long as it does not directly impact on households.

In addition, it was asked if inflation would be added to the charges that had not increased? The Cabinet Member for Resources stated that it would be prudent to undertake a review of all charges that does not directly impact on ratepayers.

Reference was made to fixed penalty notices and their charges. It was commented that clean-up operations attributed to clearing up dog faeces and litter were costly and fixed penalty charges, whilst contributing towards these costs were also a form of punishment for irresponsible behaviour therefore, it was asked if the fixed penalty charges could be increased? The Head of Waste and Environmental Services explained that the Council, in setting the charges were governed by legislation and the charges seen within the digest were set towards the upper limit and that any further increase would fall outside of the legislation. A further increase to reach the absolute maximum could be achieved in the future in consultation with the relevant Cabinet Member. It was strongly expressed that a review take place on all fixed penalty notice charges and ensure that they are set to the maximum limit of the legislation as soon as practically possible.

RESOLVED subject to the Committees comments being considered as part of the consultation that:-

4.1 the 2022/23 – 2024/25 Revenue Budget Strategy Consultation be received;

4.2 the Charging Digests for the Environmental and Public Protection, as detailed in Appendix C to the report, be endorsed.

COMMUNITY & REGENERATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The Committee considered the report presented by the Cabinet Member for Resources on the Council's Revenue Budget Strategy 2022/23 to 2024/25, as endorsed by the Cabinet for consultation purposes at its meeting held on the 17th January 2022. The report provided Members with the current view of the Revenue Budget for 2022/2023 together with indicative figures for the 2023/2024 and 2024/2025 financial years based on officers' projections of spending requirements and taken account of the provisional settlement issued by Welsh Government on the 21st December 2021. It also reflected current departmental submissions for savings proposals after taking account of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the delivery of those savings.

The Cabinet Member advised that the provisional settlement from Welsh Government this year was considerably higher than we had planned for, however

he also noted that the scale of expenditure pressures that we and other local authorities were facing was also at an unprecedented high level, which offset the higher settlement. The provisional settlement represented an average increase of 9.4% across Wales on the 2021/22 settlement, Carmarthenshire's increase had been 9.2% (£26.335m) thereby taking the Aggregate External Finance to £311.957m for 2022/23 which included £302k in respect of the Social Care Workforce Grant.

Across the whole of the council's budgets, validation added £23m, by some margin the highest we have needed to allow for in recent years. The budget also included £12.5m. for new departmental expenditure pressures which have been identified by departments and were inescapable if we are to continue to deliver our main services at the current level. As with the inflationary uplift, this is considerably more than we have normally had to build in and reflects the scale of pressures on council services currently.

Turning to our savings proposals, the Cabinet Member highlighted our continued response to the pandemic had further impacted on the delivery of efficiencies. Nevertheless, he noted our budget strategy puts forward some £3.8m of savings next year and a further £7.9m over the following 2 years. Within this committee's remit, the current proposals totalled some £268k in year 1 and a further £573k over the following 2 years.

The Budget Strategy proposed a Council Tax of 4.39% for 2022/23, in line with the Medium-Term Financial Plan, and that proposal would be considered as part of the budget finalisation process over the next month and where the Authority received further clarification on cost and grant funding with a view to limiting the Council Tax increase as far as possible. Final budget proposals would then be presented to the Cabinet late February, to ensure a balanced budget was presented to County Council.

The Committee thereupon considered the following detailed budget information appended to the Strategy relevant to its remit:

- **Appendix A(i)** – Efficiency summary for the Regeneration, Leisure, Planning and Non HRA Housing Services;
- **Appendix A(ii)** – Growth Pressures summary for the Regeneration and Planning Services (none for the Leisure and Non HRA Services);
- **Appendix B** – Budget monitoring report for the Regeneration, Leisure, Planning and Non HRA Housing Services;
- **Appendix C** – Charging Digest for the Regeneration, Leisure, Planning and Non HRA Housing Services;

The following questions/issues were raised on the report:-

- In response to a question on the savings achieved on travelling costs during the covid pandemic, the Director of Corporate Services advised that while those figures were available departmentally and in some cases had been adjusted as part of the budget process, they were not consolidated corporately, as we needed to understand the impact of the revised way of working post covid before adjustment to the corporate were made. However, he would make arrangements for the committee to be provided with that information.

RESOLVED that:

4.1 The 2022/23 – 2024/25 Revenue Budget Strategy Consultation be received.

4.2 The Charging Digests for the Regeneration, Leisure, Planning and Non HRA Services, as detailed in Appendix C to the report, be endorsed.

SOCIAL CARE & HEALTH SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The Committee considered the Revenue Budget Strategy 2022/23 to 2024/25 which had been considered and approved by the Cabinet as its meeting on the 17th January, 2021. It was also noted that members of the Committee had recently attended consultation events on the budget which had provided them with an opportunity to ask questions and seek clarification on various aspects of the budget.

The report provided Members with the current view of the Revenue Budget for 2022/23 together with indicative figures for the 2024/25 financial years.

The Committee considered the following detailed budget information appended to the Strategy relevant to its remit.

- Appendix A – Corporate Budget Strategy 2022/23 to 2024/25
- Appendix A(i) – Efficiency summary for the Social Care & Health Service
- Appendix A(ii) – Growth Pressures summary for the Social Care & Health Service
- Appendix B – Budget monitoring report for the Social Care & Health Service
- Appendix C – Charging Digest for the Social Care & Health Service

The Head of Financial Services provided an overview of the report. Key points covered included:

- Committee was advised that the report provided members with an update on the latest efficiency proposals. It considered the budget validations necessary, the service pressures and it took into account the provisional budget settlement which was issued by Welsh Government to Authorities on the 21st December 2021.
- While the provisional settlement was higher than had been planned the scale of expenditure pressures were at an unprecedented level. Given this the Authority would need to continue to provide efficiency savings with this and future years budget.
- On an all-Wales basis, the local government provisional settlement increased by 9.4% and Carmarthenshire increased by 9.2%. The Aggregate External Finance (AEF) increased to £311.957 million in 2022/23. This would help to provide for inflationary factors, demographics and demand changes to services, not least with social care.
- Welsh Government had also issued details of Service Specific Grants alongside the provisional settlement on 21 December 2021 at an all-Wales level. It was a concern that many remained at a similar level to previous years given the impact of pay awards and general inflation.
- It was stated that the final settlement would not be published until the 1st March 2022.
- The Minister's letter which accompanied the settlement was explicit that

Welsh Government expects Council to meet the cost of any future pay awards from the improved settlement.

- It was highlighted that the budget reductions required for 2022/23 was £3.8m which would ensure, based on the current projections that essential services could still be delivered.
- Taking into account the provisional settlement a proposed Council tax increase next year was 4.39%.

The following questions/issues were raised on the report:-

- It was asked if the review of transport services included making better use of the buses available included services such as Dolen Teify. The Senior Business Support Manager reassured the Committee that the Authority was ensuring that they were making best use of the available resources and would look at the installation of charging points.
- Officers were asked what impact Covid had had on the demographics and also the effect of inward migration into the County.

Officers advised that they were uncertain when the census data would be received and that data regarding inward migration was not captured. It was confirmed that data would be fed through, however the timing of this was unknown.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that:

5.1 The 2022/23 – 2024/25 Revenue Budget Strategy Consultation be received;

5.2 The Charging Digest for the Social Care & Health Service, as detailed in Appendix C to the report, be endorsed.

EDUCATION & CHILDREN SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The Committee considered the Council's Revenue Budget Strategy 2022/23 to 2024/25 which provided a current view of the revenue budget for 2021/2022 together with indicative figures for the 2023/24 and 2024/25 financial years. The report provided details of the budget process, the current Welsh Government provisional settlement issued on 21st December 2021 and the final settlement timetable and identified the validation and budget pressures that needed to be considered by Members in setting next year's revenue budget.

It was reported that, whilst significant work had already been undertaken in preparing the budget, the report represented an initial position statement which would be updated following the consultation process. Accordingly, Members were reminded that the report had been considered by the Cabinet at its meeting on the 17th January 2022 and members of the Committee had recently attended consultation events which had provided an opportunity to ask questions and seek clarification on various aspects of the budget.

The report indicated that, after adjustments for WG, identified transfers, the increase in the provisional settlement for Carmarthenshire was 9.2% (£26.335 million). The Aggregate External Finance (AEF) had therefore increased to £311.957 million in 2022/23 which accommodated teachers' pay and included £302k in respect of the Social Care Workforce Grant.

Committee's attention was drawn to section 3.5 of the budget strategy whereby an overview of the schools' delegated budgets was provided to Members. Whilst concerns were raised that many service specific grants remained at a similar level to previous years given the impact of pay awards and general inflation, it was reported to Members that for 2022/23, the RRRS grant would continue, and that the Additional Learning Needs (ALN) grant and Pupil Development grant would be enhanced

The Committee thereupon considered the following detailed budget information appended to the Strategy, relevant to its remit:-

- Appendix A(i) – Efficiency summary for the Education & Children's Services Department.
- Appendix A(ii) – Growth Pressures summary for the Education & Children's Services Department.
- Appendix B – Budget monitoring report for the Education & Children's Services Department
- Appendix C – Charging Digest for the Education & Children's Services Department

It was reported that the final settlement was due to be received from Welsh Government on the 1st March, 2022 and any amendments required to be considered in relation to the Budget Strategy arising from that announcement would also be considered by Council at its meeting scheduled for 2nd March, 2022. Officers addressed a number of member queries and observations, as follows: In response to a query regarding the take-up of the Hardship fund by Schools, Officers duly clarified the parameters in which schools could apply for the funding. It was explained to Members that common costs would usually be met from corporate departmental budgets. Furthermore, it was emphasised that individual school circumstances, in terms of the scale of impact from the Covid-19 pandemic in areas such as staffing, varied throughout the county. The Committee was assured to note that regular communication was provided to all schools to ensure all schools were aware of the funding available and encouraged to apply in accordance with eligibility criteria.

Committee referred to the provision of air purifiers for schools and queried the level of funding available to the Council. The Head of Access to Education clarified that funding in the region of £134k had been received to deal with ventilation and data was currently being collated to determine school requirements in this regard. Members were informed that a total of 36 air purifying units had been procured and allocated to date, which was sufficient to meet the current level of demand. It was however noted that the funding allocation for the longer-term solution would likely need to be enhanced to enable schools with identified ventilation issues to be retrofitted with appropriate filters. The Cabinet Member for Education referred to the Notice of Motion considered at a meeting of the Cabinet held on 17th January 2022 and reported that a response was awaited from the Minister to confirm the advice from the Technical Advisory Group and the WG progress in terms of the procurement and funding of Ultra Violet and/or High Efficiency Particulate Air Filters in schools.

In response to a query, the Cabinet Member for Resources reported that the Minister's letter which accompanied the settlement was explicit that Welsh

Government expects Council to meet the cost of any future pay awards from the improved settlement and confirmed that the 4% teacher pay awards for 2022/23 was reflected within the delegated budget.

Concerns were expressed regarding the reduction in the number of schools for 2024/25. It was clarified that a review of the Modernising Education Programme (MEP) was currently underway, following which the matter would be further considered.

The Committee commended the Director of Corporate Services and his team for the development of a budget against the backdrop of the Covid-19 pandemic and unprecedented circumstances, to ensure an appropriate provision of services for Carmarthenshire.

RESOLVED that:

5.1 The 2022/23 – 2024/25 Revenue Budget Strategy Consultation be received;

5.2 The Charging Digest detailed in Appendix C to the report, be endorsed.

POLICY & RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The Cabinet Member for Resources presented the Revenue Budget Strategy 2022/23 to 2024/25 which had been endorsed by the Cabinet for consultation purposes at its meeting on 17th January 2022. The report, which provided Members with the current view of the Revenue Budget for 2022/2023 together with indicative figures for the 2023/2024 and 2024/2025 financial years, was based on officers' projections of spending requirements and took account of the provisional settlement issued by Welsh Government on 21st December 2021. It also reflected the current departmental submissions for savings proposals. The impact on departmental spending would be dependent upon the final settlement from Welsh Government and the resultant final Budget adopted by County Council.

The budget proposals, as presented in the report, assumed the full delivery of all of the savings proposals submitted, together with the identification and delivery of the shortfall in savings proposals 2023-24 and 2024-25. Further cost reductions would need to be identified for years 2023/24 and 2024/25 to be able to maintain the current Budget Strategy and level of council tax.

It was highlighted that the critical importance of minimising the Council Tax increase for residents whilst maintaining a balanced budget in these unprecedented and challenging times was recognised.

Given the scale of the pressures and forecasted budget gap, Council Tax increases had been maintained at the previous MTFP levels of 4.4% for next year, with the savings identified in years 2 and 3 leading to indicative Council Tax increases of 3.4% and 3.8% respectively. It was considered that this would provide at least some mitigation to the savings proposals which the council needed to consider over future years of the Medium-Term Financial Plan.

Amongst the issues raised during consideration of the report were the following:

In response to concerns about the number of vacancies at the Customer Services Centres the Committee was advised that every effort was being made to fill the posts and 4 appointments had been made the previous week;

The Head of Regeneration advised that a new lease had been agreed in regard to the Nant-y-Ci Livestock Market and it was likely that the first sale would take place in March;

In response to a question the Head of Revenues and Financial Compliance stated that the Department was in the process of seeking to fill the vacant posts in the Housing Benefits Administration team.

RESOLVED to accept the report and endorse the Charging Digest.

APPENDIX A – MEMBER BUDGETSEMINAR NOTES

Questions and Feedback

Corporate Overview

- It was clarified that the figure of £757k in the budget papers was an unallocated sum which could be applied according to what councillors felt was a priority – removal of savings proposal/additional growth/lower increase in council tax
- Concern over the already high level of inflation and that risk of it going even higher might have on budgets
- Clarification over the cessation of the hardship scheme on 1st April
- Recognition of the risk/uncertainty around future of social care demand
- Clarification on how unbudgeted covid expenditure would be met from uncommitted capital schemes
-

Education & Children's Department

- Query regarding up to date position on funding on ventilation for schools, but existing and new build
- Discussion on the importance of training / adaptation to distance learning for schools staff
- Confirmation that ICT equipment was provided to all families that needed it during the pandemic as well as paper packs where internet connectivity was an issue
- Concern over long term effects of the disruption to education
- Concern over sufficient funding for all schools to be able to respond to curriculum changes
- Concern that some pupils may have gone backwards in Welsh language skills if Welsh is not spoken in the home
- Clarification sought over the exact details on schools rationalisation proposals and concern over the impact on our small schools. Explanation given as to WG definition of what constitutes a small school
- Confirmation that WG small rural schools grant will end this year

- Clarification that income proposal from Garreglwyd would be offered to neighbouring authorities, minimising impact of families travelling excessive distances
- Explanation of how the EVR budget is built up and allocated
- Explanation of the operation of ASD provision across the county
- Confirmation that ALN funding allocation is being considered by the schools budget forum
- Concern over increases in the School Insurance Fund premia
- Concern over the impact of the proposal to reduce funding to 3rd sector
- Clarity sought over savings proposals linked to school meals and impact of WG primary universal free provision
- Suggestion that school kitchens could be used as hubs to eg offer meals on wheels

Communities Department

- Concern that current vacancies is putting increased pressure on existing staff
- Concern over backlog of assessments
- Issue of mental health raised, particularly in younger people
- Discussion over increased Pembrey Country Park pricing increased linked to increased investment over successive years
- Question over deliverability of St Clears LC savings
- Question over future timelines for day services opening
- Discussion over transport savings proposals
- Sentiment that more needs to be done to help citizens understand the services pressures faced by the department

Chief Executives Department

- Explanation on commercial rents reduction due to a combination of both increased voids combined with achievable rent levels.
- Discussion on agile working and 30% WG guidelines and what this means on base office vs touchdown vs home. Aspiration from members to have more face to face meetings but retain benefits of remote such as increased capacity – hybrid
- Concern that call centre figures to not include emergency / OOH so may be underestimated
- Discussion on pros and cons of shifting democratic meetings to evenings and consideration of a creche to support younger members applying
- Concern over poverty and reliance on foodbanks expected to continue for many
- Assurance provided to members on resilience and security of ICT systems
- Discussion on Levelling up funding
- Corporate Services Department
- Assurance given on robustness of anti fraud measures implemented with additional grants funding to businesses
- Concern over increased demand on CTRS and HB and sufficient staffing
- Discussion on inductions for new staff when everyone is working from home.

- Discussion on procurement thresholds and importance which local procurement can play given scale of council expenditure
- Concern over rising inflation and whether it was adequately provided for in the budget

Environment Department

- Discussion over shift of parts of corporate property to Communities department and how they will support work on the housing stock
- Concern over further reductions to the highways revenue budgets and the need to lobby WG for funding
- Explanation of the pressure which waste amnesties create
- Discussion on the distinction made between active travel and levelling up bid for Towy Valley Path. Concern that active travel funding policy from WG does not favour rural constituencies
- Serious concerns over £3m capital grants reduced from WG
- Concern over funding required to address high number of substandard bridges
- Belief that current HWRC booking system is leading to increase in fly tipping
- Suggestion to increase workforce engagement to identify efficiencies
- Request that current agency workers be directly employed
- Update given on the electric rural buses pathfinder project
- Multiple members expressed their gratitude for the hard work and expertise during the pandemic and flooding response
- Proposal that the budget headroom be allocated to the department
- Clarification given that £500k was set aside in the budget to accelerate decarbonisation
- Update given on waste strategy and confirmation that it is still on target for 2024
- Concerns around planning enforcement
- Concerns raised over how successful introducing charging into additional car parks would be
- Discussion over pothole emergency repairs vs proper patching and risk of insurance claims
- Confirmation that advertising on roundabouts to raise income is being evaluated
- Request that utility company damage is made good and they are held responsible

APPENDIX B – CARMARTHENSHIRE LOCAL ACCESS FORUM RESPONSE

The Carmarthenshire Local Access Forum (LAF) understands that the budget proposal is to continue to fund the rights of way teams at existing levels. Whilst this is broadly acceptable under current circumstances, the LAF would like to remind the authority that it is a requirement for authorities to ensure that sufficient resources are devoted to meeting their statutory duties with regard to the protection and recording of public rights of way and that the rights of way network is in a fit condition for those who wish to use it. The LAF receives regular updates with regards to the state of the network and the number of outstanding issues. Unfortunately, these have been rising over recent years. The number of outstanding maintenance issues has grown 50% over the past 5 years to nearly 2,000, and the number of legal issues has more than doubled to over 800. The LAF feels that funding should be increased to help reduce these outstanding issues, improve the network further and ensure the authority meets its statutory duties. An improved rights of way network will help improve the health of the population, provide better amenities for residents and tourists, and reduce carbon emissions by ensuring people have to travel shorter distances to use the network. The LAF would also like to request that as a minimum funding levels increase year on year to cover inflationary costs that will be faced by the authority. Finally the LAF would also like to remind the authority that it needs to deliver its commitments under the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act, which may require additional funding.