

REVENUE BUDGET 2024 - 2027

CONSULTATION REPORT

FEBRUARY 2024

carmarthenshire.gov.uk

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Carmarthenshire
County Council



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INTRODUCTION

A mixed-methods approach to ascertaining views on the 2024-27 budget took place during the period from 22 December 2023 to 28 January 2024.

In making savings, the Council is concerned to minimise the impact upon service delivery. In meeting the challenge of bridging the budget shortfall of over £20 million, many savings are being made through internal service changes. It is however recognised that some savings proposals will potentially have an impact on service delivery. These are known as 'policy' proposals and 11 proposals are being considered by the Council in balancing its budget for 2024-27.

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 its 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. Details the **specific consultation findings** in relation to each of the 11 proposals; and
5. 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 required the Council to make significant cost reductions, which remains challenging following the Covid-19 pandemic. In response, Council departments identified proposals for making savings and a consultation exercise was undertaken to elicit views on levels of agreement, possible impacts and ways the impacts could be minimised (mitigation).

Councillor involvement

A series of departmental seminars for all county councillors took place over a five-day period: 15 January 2024 and 19 January 2024.² Efficiencies across departments were considered in detail and feedback sought. Bullet points below provide an outlook of

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.

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.

their views and further suggestions on efficiencies. Councillor feedback regarding the public consultation can be found against the relevant proposals.

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

Survey

The survey provided financial and service information on each of the 11 policy proposals and asked respondents to express a view on the degree to which they supported the proposal.³ Views were also sought regarding the potential impact of implementing the proposal on people and communities.⁴

The survey was administered in two principal ways:

- 1) Electronically via the Council's online consultation page on the website
- 2) Hard copies were available on request in order to maximise the response rate.

A total of **4292 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.

Insight

Teams from 9 secondary schools across Carmarthenshire have given their views on proposals in the Council's budget as part of an event designed to engage with young people. The Council's annual Insight event is open to all secondary schools in the county and gives pupils the chance to put themselves in the roles of the Council's Cabinet and discuss their opinions on the proposed budget. The aim of the event is to introduce young people to local government and give them an insight into the challenges on a day-to-day basis. It is also an opportunity for Cabinet Members to hear pupils' views and discuss with them directly about issues that matter to them.

This year, pupils from years 10-13 from Ysgol y Strade, Ysgol Gyfun Emlyn, QE High, Dyffryn Taf, Ysgol Gyfun Bro Myrddin, Glan-y-Mor, Dyffryn Aman, Ysgol Bro Dinefwr and St John Lloyds took part in the event on Thursday January 25 at County Hall in Carmarthen.

The results are outlined in Chapter 5.

Other [Email responses received]

5 emails and letters were submitted to the Council during the budget consultation period. These emails have been included in the overall analysis of the budget consultation.

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. Information was also highlighted on the council, and on the newsroom throughout the consultation. Relevant information was additionally posted on social media (X and Facebook).

³ The format of the survey was identical to the previous budget survey, to ensure comparability of results for all 11 proposals.

⁴ The responses are important in establishing the impact of Council proposals on people – a key consideration in undertaking good decision making based on evidence, and a requirement of the 2010 Equality Act.

In addition, the consultation was publicised through relevant equality groups, including Equality Carmarthenshire, Ageing Well Carmarthenshire and the Carmarthenshire Disability Coalition for Action. In addition, All Town and Community Councils were asked to take part using the online consultation.

The public consultation phase ran from 22 December 2023 to 28 January 2024. In total, 4292 responses were received, only 12 were paper based.

About Average Index Score (AIS). Sometimes known as a ‘weighted average’, the AIS is a way of distilling the ‘balance and strength of opinion’ down into one number. Useful for questions with options to ‘strongly agree’, ‘disagree’, etc., the technique is used throughout the report. Values range from 2 (*everyone* strongly agrees) to minus 2 (*everyone* strongly disagrees).

Example

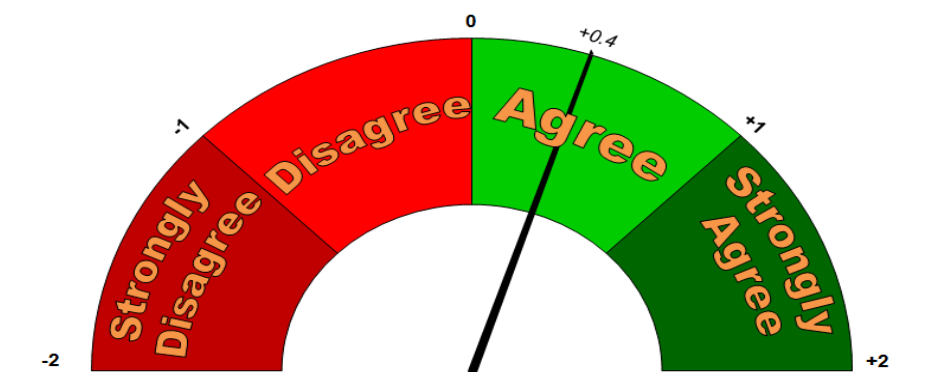
10 people are asked whether they ‘strongly agree’, ‘agree’, ‘have no opinion’, ‘disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’ that Wales will win the six nations.

Results...

- 3 strongly agree (each response worth 2, so=**6**)
- 3 agree (each response worth 1, so=**3**)
- 1 no opinion (each response worth 0, so=**0**)
- 1 disagree (each response worth -1, so= **-1**)
- 2 strongly disagree (each response worth -2, so=**-4**)

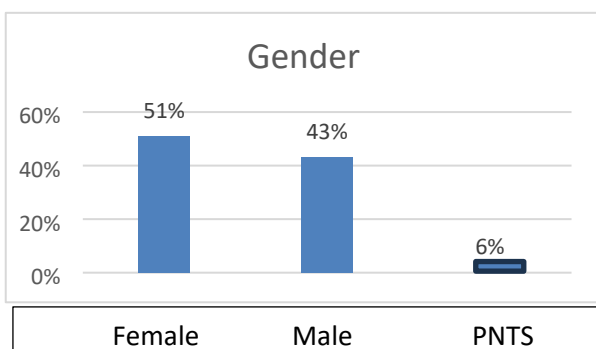
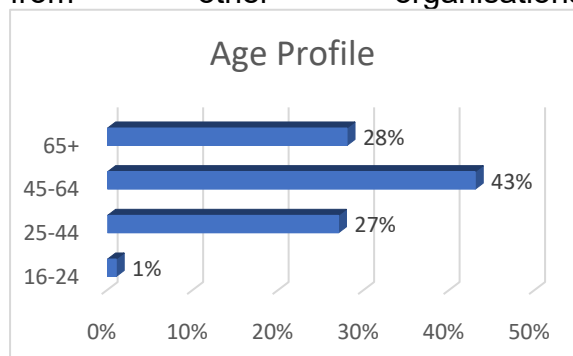
The AIS is calculated by adding all the numbers in bold: so, $6+3+0-1-4=4$;

Then dividing by the number of responses (10 in this case). The average index score is: $4\div 10=$ **0.4** (shown graphically below)



2) RESPONDENT PROFILE

Of the 4126 respondents who gave completed answers to demographic questions: 99% were from individuals, 7 Town and Community Councils, 25 businesses and 12 from other organisations.



Demographic Characteristic	Overall %
Transgender	0.6%
PNTS	6.2%
Relationship status	
Single	13.5%
Married	61.1%
Separated/Divorced	7.5%
Widowed	4.1%
Civil partnership	3.5%
PNTS	9%
Sexual orientation	
Straight	83.6%
LGB	3.1%
PNTS	12.9%
Religion	
Yes	47.2%
PNTS	9.2%
Caring responsibilities	
Yes	23.9%
PNTS	6%

Demographic Characteristic	Overall %
Ethnicity	
White	90.3%
BME	1.6%
Other	<1%
PNTS	7.4%
Disability	
Yes	19.5%
No	72.9%
PNTS	7.7%
Preferred language	
Welsh	15.5%
English	85.6%
Other	1.3%
Income	
<£15,000	8.8%
£15,000 – £29,999	24.1%
£30,000 – £44,999	18%
Over £45000	27.4%
PNTS	21.7%

A total of 3446 respondents included their post codes. These have been grouped into six community areas for analytical purposes. Appendix 1 maps out the community area boundaries and their constituent postcodes.

	Community Area 1	Community Area 2	Community Area 3	Community Area 4	Community Area 5	Community Area 6
% Responses	24.6%	15.9%	38.4%	11.7%	17%	16.5%
Number of Responses	846	547	1322	402	585	567

3) SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

Headline results – all 11 proposals

The table below shows the results from the budget consultation survey. It shows details of the proposal, then gives results for the question: 'how strongly do you agree, or disagree, with this proposal'.⁵ The table is ranked in order by AIS score. Those proposals with higher levels of support, reflected in higher AIS scores, appear first.⁶

Rank	Ranking	3 Year Saving	Average Index Score	Sample
1	School Transport Eligibility Review	£38000	0.67	4047
2	HWRC	£73000	0.62	4104
3	Access to blue bags and bin liners	£140000	0.5	4090
4	End School Transport Appeals Panel	£33000	0.44	4074
5	Staffing Budget	N/A	0.37	4066
6	School crossing patrol	£48000	0.37	4094
7	Music Service	£285000	0.14	4046
8	Post 16 transport	£712000	0.05	4075
9	Public Conveniences	£210000	-0.04	4075
10	Youth Support Service	£500000	-0.05	4051
11	School Delegated Budget	£3,454,000	-0.38	4077

⁵ The survey itself gave summary information about each proposal to inform the decisions of respondents.

⁶ Values near to zero may indicate no clear consensus or may reflect apathy in relation to the proposal.

4) CONSULTATION FINDINGS – ALL PROPOSALS

Below, all 11 proposals are considered individually, in turn, in order to lay out a *comprehensive summary* of relevant consultation information.

Each summary begins by detailing relevant facts and figures, including the value of the proposal, its average index score (AIS), and its AIS rank against other proposals. It also gives an AIS for selected categories of respondent, for comparative purposes, and also to help meet our Equality Duty of demonstrating ‘due regard’ to equality. It is important to recognise that some proposals will be of specific relevance to people in certain categories. This must be taken in account in reaching decisions.

Views expressed through the public consultation have been considered together and themes identified.

The ‘other relevant information’ section includes information from *specific* sources, such as representations and organisational responses.

The views of councillors, (as expressed through budget seminars or scrutiny committees) are included under the ‘councillor engagement’ heading.

In the AIS charts that follow for each proposal, negative values are highlighted to show where results are, on balance, in opposition.

In order to strengthen the decision-making process, where a proposal has formed part of a previous budget consultation, these results are also included, for comparative purposes.

Information on all Equality impact assessments for each of the 11 proposals are available on request.

1. Staffing Budgets

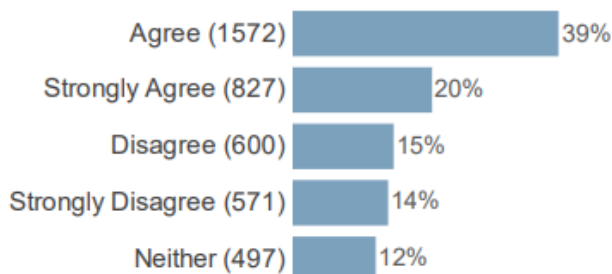
Information on savings proposal:
 We are proposing to apply a council-wide staff vacancy factor of between 2% and 2.5% to departmental budgets. This would mean that each department would be responsible for delivering its services with between 98% and 97.5% of the current staffing budget, and would do so by holding enough jobs vacant to achieve between 2% and 2.5% savings over the course of the financial year. This would help protect the services we deliver from permanent cuts, but it would have some impact on the responsiveness of the service. Please note that this will not affect grant funded posts, which can account for 10-20% of roles, depending on specific services.

Increase in Council Tax if not adopted: 1.79%

To what extent do you agree or disagree with this proposal?

Staffing Budgets

Average Index Score: 0.37
Overall Rank (of 11): 5
Sample Size: 4066

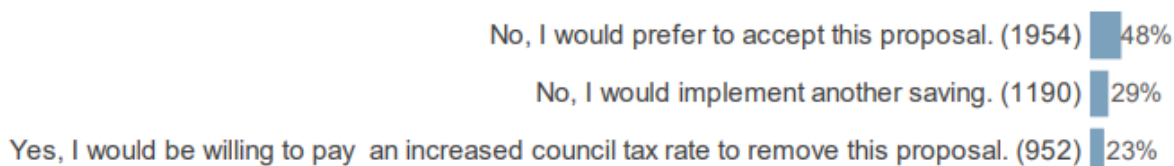


	16-24	25-44	45-64	65+	Pregnant	Mat/Pat	Female	Male	Disabled	Gender Reas.
AIS	-0.44	0.08	0.35	0.7	0.37	0.06	0.19	0.58	0.32	0.12
Sample	25	1064	1696	1039	38	47	1990	1690	748	26

	Carers	LGBTQ+	BME	Single	Religion	less £20k	£20-39k	£40k+	Welsh Language	Armed forces
AIS	0.25	0.51	0.26	0.3	0.42	0.41	0.36	0.32	0.31	0.53
Sample	921	118	65	1371	1796	1247	0.36	825	595	405

	CA1	CA2	CA3	CA4	CA5	CA6
AIS	0.45	0.55	0.38	0.53	0.39	0.26
Sample	825	530	1291	386	570	544

Would you accept a 1.79% increase on your council tax in order to avoid this efficiency proposal?



799 comments were received on the proposal.

Impact

- Concerns about Impact on Staffing: Many express concerns about the impact on staff, including increased pressure, stress, and burnout. Some suggest that current staff should work to capacity and that working from home should not be permitted.
- Suggestions for Alternative Approaches: Several suggest alternative approaches to saving money, such as reviewing management structures, cutting top earners' wages, streamlining processes, reducing unnecessary spending (like on cycle paths), and scrutinising procurement and contracts for value.
- Criticism of Council Management and Spending: Many criticise council management, suggesting that there are too many middle managers, wasteful spending, and excessive wages for top personnel.
- Concerns about Service Quality: Several express concerns about the impact on service quality, particularly in areas like education, safety, and essential care services. Some suggest that these areas should be prioritised over cost-cutting measures.
- Lack of Transparency and Detail: Some express frustration with the lack of transparency regarding the roles and salaries of top earners and the details of proposed changes.
-

Mitigation

- Review Management Structures: Some suggest reviewing the current management structures within the council to potentially reduce the number of middle managers and streamline processes. This could potentially free up resources and reduce the need for frontline staff cuts.
- Cut Wages for Higher-Up Personnel: There are calls to reduce the wages of higher-up personnel within the council. This could help save money without directly impacting frontline services or lower-level staff.
- Streamline Processes: People have suggested streamlining administrative processes within the council to improve efficiency and reduce unnecessary spending. For example, eliminating redundant steps in invoice processing or procurement could save time and resources.
- Scrutinize Procurement and Contracts: There are calls to scrutinize procurement practices and contracts to ensure that the council is getting value for money. This could involve centralizing procurement, monitoring purchasing more closely, and seeking out cheaper alternatives where possible.

2. Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRC)

3 Year Savings: £73,000

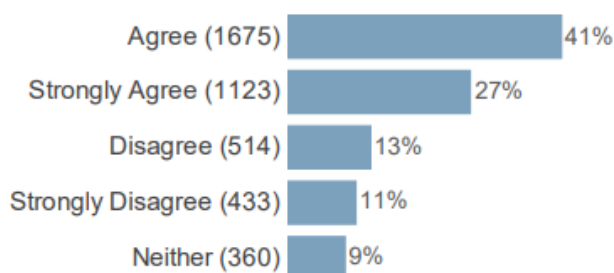
Description:

This proposal focuses on changing the opening hours and opening days of all HWRCs. This will mean that all sites will be reviewed and only open up to 8 hours per day per site. This review may also see the potential of reduced opening days at all sites (5 days opening being a minimum). The opening hours of each individual site will be based on usage data and further engagement with local residents and local members.

Increase in Council Tax if not adopted: 0.07%

How strongly do you agree, or disagree, with this proposal?

Average Index Score: 0.62
Overall Rank (of 11): 2
Sample Size: 4104



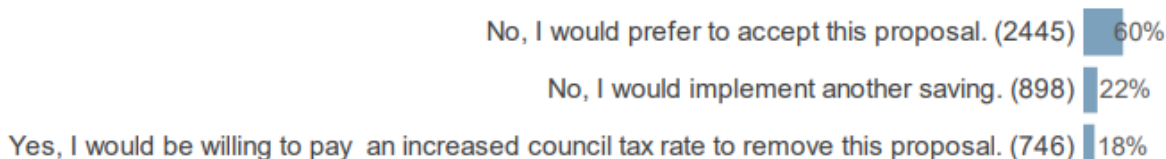
	16-24	25-44	45-64	65+	Pregnant	Mat/Pat	Female	Male	Disabled	Gender Reas.
AIS	0.88	0.63	0.63	0.62	0.68	0.72	0.67	0.61	0.54	0.56
Sample	26	1064	1728	1055	37	46	2010	1719	758	25

	Carers	LGBTQ+	BME	Single	Religion	less £20k	£20-39k	£40k+	Welsh Language	Armed forces
AIS	0.56	0.62	0.36	0.62	0.64	0.62	0.7	0.47	0.65	0.66
Sample	935	120	64	1380	1812	1270	1773	842	595	415

	CA1	CA2	CA3	CA4	CA5	CA6
AIS	0.74	0.67	0.62	0.65	0.63	0.46
Sample	838	533	1298	390	576	559

Response to accepting a 0.07% increase in the Council Tax in order to avoid efficiency saving.

Would you accept a 0.07% increase on your council tax in order to avoid this efficiency proposal?



688 comments were received on the proposal.

Impact

- Widespread concern about the potential increase in fly tipping and subsequent environmental health ramifications, particularly in light of the three-weekly collection for black bags
- Views that the 3-year saving yielded would not justify the environmental impact of the proposal and any saving would be offset by the increased clean-up / enforcement costs of fly tipping incidents
- Reduction in core operating hours would have a disproportionate impact on users who are in full-time employment
- Geographical impact – concern that rural residents will be hit hardest by the proposal given the travelling distances
- Concern that the proposal would have staffing / resourcing implications, diminishing the service provided at each facility
- An opposing view that staffing levels at each facility could be rationalised in order to realise the saving
- Some observed that the proposal is at odds with the Council's ambitions around sustainability and circular economy. Some queried whether this would impair CCC's ability to meet its recycling targets
- Those in favour advised they would support a reduced service during the week to preserve access on weekends, therefore catering to all user groups
- Others sought further information on opening hours

Mitigation

- Ensure Centres are open on weekends to provide equitable and flexible access for those in employment
- Reintroduce online booking system to manage access
- Use of incentives to encourage recycling
- Income generation of recycled goods
- Promote alternative recycling points (e.g. in supermarket car parks)
- Volunteering

3. Access to Blue Bags and Food Bin Liners

3 Year Savings: £140,000

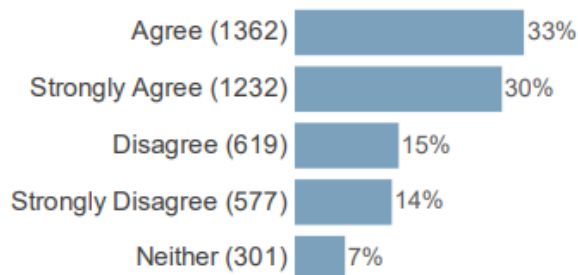
Description:

We deliver blue bags and food liners at the beginning of the year as part of our annual delivery programme. Blue bags or food liners will not be readily available from Hwbs and other outlets. Those who genuinely need additional bags (for example large families) can contact the authority.

Increase in Council Tax if not adopted: 0.13%

How strongly do you agree, or disagree, with this proposal?

Average Index Score: 0.50
Overall Rank (of 11): 3
Sample Size: 4090



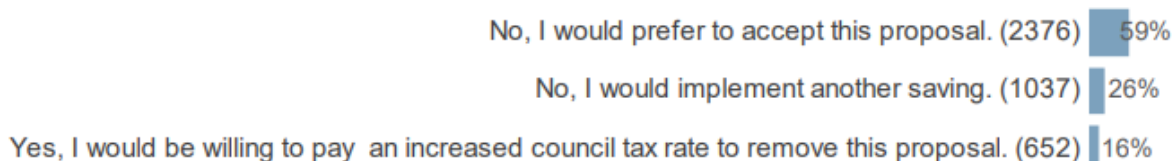
	16-24	25-44	45-64	65+	Pregnant	Mat/Pat	Female	Male	Disabled	Gender Reas.
AIS	0.88	0.38	0.46	0.7	0.27	0.4	0.48	0.55	0.36	0.35
Sample	25	1064	1721	1050	37	47	2004	1711	757	26

	Carers	LGBTQ+	BME	Single	Religion	less £20k	£20-39k	£40k+	Welsh Language	Armed forces
AIS	0.42	0.48	0.86	0.51	0.57	0.56	0.55	0.37	0.59	0.45
Sample	933	119	66	1372	1809	1265	1774	830	589	411

	CA1	CA2	CA3	CA4	CA5	CA6
AIS	0.64	0.8	0.5	0.53	0.48	0.34
Sample	831	535	1293	391	572	555

Response to accepting a 0.13% increase in the Council Tax in order to avoid efficiency saving.

Would you accept a 0.13% increase on your council tax in order to avoid this efficiency proposal?



Access to Blue Bags and Food Bin Liners

835 comments were received on the proposal.

Impact

- Majority view that this will have a detrimental impact on Carmarthenshire's recycling targets and encourage fly tipping
- May lead to increase in black bag waste
- Larger households are reliant on supply of additional bags
- Those purchasing or renting a new property may not have access to bags
- Agreement on the basis that the annual distribution of three rolls is reasonable for the majority of households
- View that the Council's ability to 'bulk buy' blue and food liner bags is more cost effective and the cost should not be borne by residents
- Some respondents in favour of the proposal as surplus bags are misused for other purposes
- Unclear what the alternative would be and how the bags would be delivered/collected
- Comments on the variable quality of the blue and food bin bags. Also, many reported non-delivery of bags - increasing reliance on alternative provision

Mitigation

- Number of bags should be allocated in accordance with household size
- Distribution via appropriate Town/Community Council facilities and HWRCs
- Introduce a small charge for bags collected from Hwbs
- Encourage households to bring in any surplus bags to the Hwbs
- Online form to request additional blue and food bin bags
- Option to 'opt out' of food bin liner bags online to reduce the total number of bags the Council procures
- Remove requirement for blue 'Carmarthenshire' bags in favour of generic/clear bags

4. School Crossing Patrols

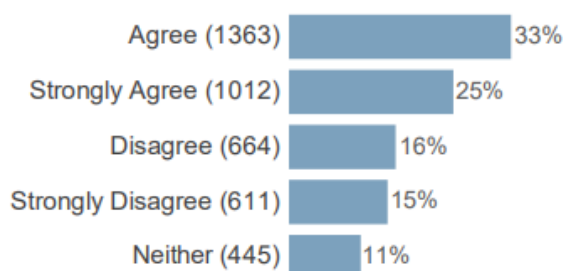
3 Year Savings: £90,000

Description: We currently have 42 School Crossing Patrol sites. School Crossing Patrol Officers are paid for the limited hours they patrol on school days. The necessity to have a School Crossing Patrol at a particular location is subject to national guidance which considers a range of criteria such as traffic flows and conditions, pedestrian use, difficulty in crossing roads, visibility and frequency of gaps in traffic. This is done to assess whether a site presents a risk to pedestrians and requires a patrol in place. Of the 42 designated sites currently patrolled, only 30 of these sites meet the threshold criteria for having a School Crossing Patrol. It is proposed that 12 of the sites will no longer require a school crossing patrol if they do not meet the national criteria.

Increase in Council Tax if not adopted: 0.04%

Average Index Score: 0.37
Overall Rank (of 11): 6
Sample Size: 4094

How strongly do you agree, or disagree, with this proposal?



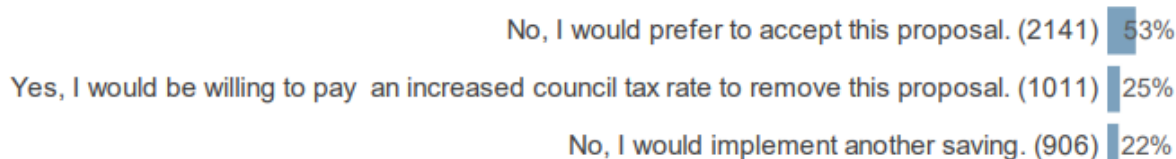
	16-24	25-44	45-64	65+	Pregnant	Mat/Pat	Female	Male	Disabled	Gender Reas.
AIS	0.12	0.25	0.44	0.39	0.3	0.09	0.3	0.46	0.29	0.38
Sample	26	1067	1724	1047	37	47	2019	1702	758	26

	Carers	LGBTQ+	BME	Single	Religion	less £20k	£20-39k	£40k+	Welsh Language	Armed forces
AIS	0.33	0.39	0.47	0.37	0.4	0.33	0.42	0.34	0.42	0.48
Sample	931	120	66	1383	1804	1267	1772	834	592	412

	CA1	CA2	CA3	CA4	CA5	CA6
AIS	0.38	0.5	0.35	0.48	0.3	0.35
Sample	834	534	1298	389	572	557

Response to accepting a 0.04% increase in the Council Tax in order to avoid efficiency saving.

Would you accept a 0.04% increase on your council tax in order to avoid this efficiency proposal?



623 comments were received on the proposal.
 Impact

- A wide-ranging concern that the proposal presents a risk to pupil safety
- Three-year saving is negligible in comparison to potential impact
- Importance of encouraging pupils/families to walk to school was emphasised – improved physical and mental wellbeing
- Comments on the affordability of school crossing patrols in view of the national cost of the 20mph scheme
- Observations that some sites have both a School Crossing Patrol Officer and Pelican/Zebra crossing
- Staffing implications were raised by many respondents
- Alternate views that the introduction of 20mph speed limits in built up areas should improve road safety, negating the requirement for School Crossing Patrol Officers

Mitigation

- It was suggested that schools should assume responsibility if they do not meet the national criteria
- Introduce Pelican crossings
- Use of other speed restriction measures – e.g. speed humps, cameras, traffic islands
- Consider a ‘variable’ service in which patrols are maintained during the winter months when the risk is higher (i.e. adverse weather, darker mornings, poorer visibility) but scaled back or ceased at other times
- Volunteering

5. End School Transport Appeals Panel

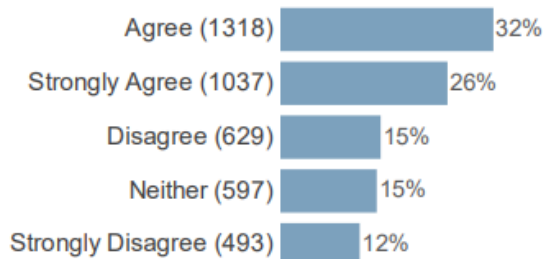
3 Year Savings: £33,000

Description: This savings proposal is based on ending the second stage appeals process and maintaining assessments purely in line with the Welsh Government set criteria.

Increase in Council Tax if not adopted: 0.03%

How strongly do you agree, or disagree, with this proposal?

Average Index Score: 0.44
Overall Rank (of 11): 4
Sample Size: 4074



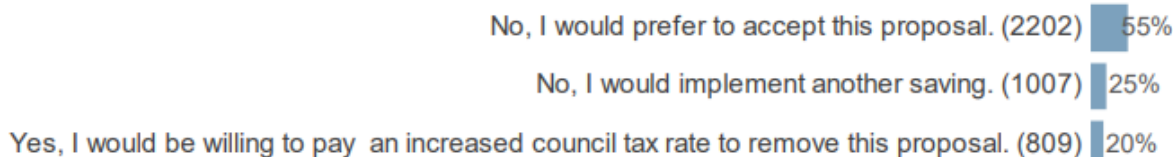
	16-24	25-44	45-64	65+	Pregnant	Mat/Pat	Female	Male	Disabled	Gender Reas.
AIS	0.27	0.54	0.45	0.14	0.6	0.36	0.55	0.31	-0.08	0.33
Sample	1062	1718	1040	37	47	2004	1700	753	26	930

	Carers	LGBTQ+	BME	Single	Religion	less £20k	£20-39k	£40k+	Welsh Language	Armed forces
AIS	0.33	0.65	0.65	0.4	0.51	0.43	0.46	836	0.53	0.54
Sample	930	119	65	1374	1796	1262	1759	836	588	411

	CA1	CA2	CA3	CA4	CA5	CA6
AIS	0.4	0.48	0.46	0.46	0.45	0.48
Sample	824	530	1292	390	572	556

Response to accepting a 0.03% increase in the Council Tax in order to avoid efficiency saving.

Would you accept a 0.03% increase on your council tax in order to avoid this efficiency proposal?



490 comments were received on the proposal.

Impact

- Those against the proposal emphasised the significance of maintaining a robust two-stage appeals process that provides fairness to all applicants and preserves the right to challenge
- Views that a blanket approach may not work in all cases and the Council should continue to use its discretion if national criteria are not met
- Some queried whether this saving would give rise to judicial reviews
- Potential social impacts were highlighted by several respondents
- Many observed that the alternative of public transport would not be a viable option at a time when bus services are being reduced
- Increased risk of truancy
- It was argued that the cost-effectiveness of the proposal should be based on the success rate of the appeals process as this would evidence whether the criteria are being applied correctly and diligently during the initial assessment. If a high number of appeals succeed, this strengthens the case to maintain the Appeals Panel
- General comments in favour of school transport for all pupils to reduce private car usage and pollution and create a safer environment around schools

Mitigation

- Introduce a nominal charge for non-eligible parents as a means of subsidising the school transport service

6. Post-16 School Transport

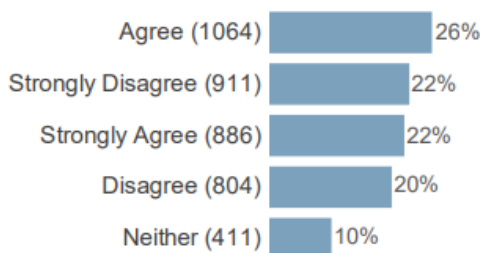
3 Year Savings: £712,000

Description: Learners aged 16 to 18 attending school or college will no longer be provided with free transport, which will mean learners having to make their own arrangements, such as using public transport or private travel. The proposal will be implemented in the academic year 25/26. Further engagement will take place for those requiring this provision.

Increase in Council Tax if not adopted: 0.64%

How strongly do you agree, or disagree, with this proposal?

Average Index Score: 0.05
Rank (of 11): 8
Sample Size: 4075



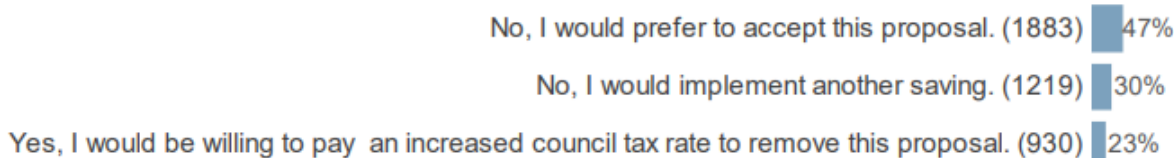
	16-24	25-44	45-64	65+	Pregnant	Mat/Pat	Female	Male	Disabled	Gender Reas.
AIS	-0.38	-0.3	0.11	0.3	-0.25	-0.62	-0.14	0.26	0.1	-0.12
Sample	26	1062	1710	1046	36	47	1996	1707	756	25

	Carers	LGBTQ+	BME	Single	Religion	less £20k	£20-39k	£40k+	Welsh Language	Armed forces
AIS	-0.01	0.18	0.05	0.09	0.13	0.19	-0.07	0.1	-0.15	0.29
Sample	938	119	65	1373	1793	1261	1765	832	590	414

	CA1	CA2	CA3	CA4	CA5	CA6
AIS	-0.02	0.01	0.1	0.02	0.1	0.15
Sample	825	533	1292	389	569	556

Response to accepting a 0.64% increase in the Council Tax in order to avoid efficiency saving.

Would you accept a 0.64% increase on your council tax in order to avoid this efficiency proposal?



692 comments were received on the proposal.

Impact

- A widely held view that this will create a barrier to accessing further education, particularly for low-income households
- Impact will be more pronounced in rural areas where students must travel longer distances, journey costs are higher and public transport services are infrequent / unreliable
- Some highlighted the potential longer-term impacts on Carmarthenshire's economy – lower skilled workforce, increase in NEETs (young people Not in Education, Employment or Training) and migration
- The environmental impacts of increased car usage were emphasised
- Comments in favour noted the proposal would bring Carmarthenshire in line with other Welsh counties

Mitigation

- Introduce a nominal charge to maintain the service
- Means-testing to preserve access for disadvantaged households
- Introduce eligibility criteria based on proximity to school/college
- Annual passes
- Prioritise college transport over school transport
- Suggestions that colleges should bear some/all of the costs of providing the service

7. School Transport Eligibility Review

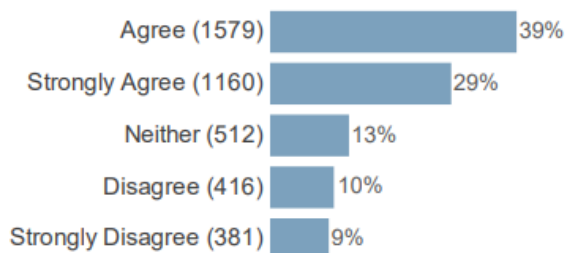
3 Year Savings: £38,000

Description: The proposal seeks to remove duplication by offering transport only to a learner's catchment school, whilst maintaining the choice to attend a school of their language preference. This would remove duplication in the network and will also consider the review of school catchments.

Increase in Council Tax if not adopted: 0.03%

How strongly do you agree, or disagree, with this proposal?

Average Index Score: 0.67
Overall Rank (of 11): 1
Sample Size: 4047



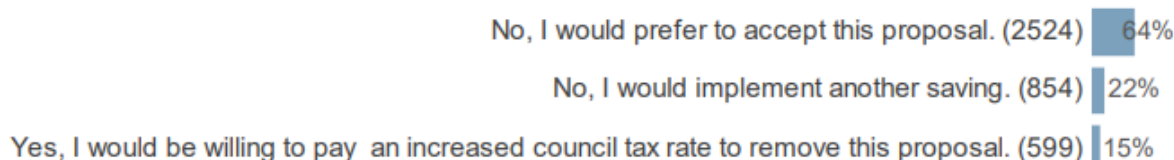
	16-24	25-44	45-64	65+	Pregnant	Mat/Pat	Female	Male	Disabled	Gender Reas.
AIS	0.52	0.4	0.78	0.79	0.47	0.33	0.6	0.78	0.54	0.19
Sample	25	1053	1693	1047	36	46	1980	1701	745	26

	Carers	LGBTQ+	BME	Single	Religion	less £20k	£20-39k	£40k+	Welsh Language	Armed forces
AIS	0.61	0.75	0.75	0.62	0.76	0.7	0.67	0.63	0.67	0.83
Sample	928	118	63	1361	1783	1253	1750	833	586	409

	CA1	CA2	CA3	CA4	CA5	CA6
AIS	0.7	0.72	0.68	0.68	0.67	0.71
Sample	834	530	1279	385	568	548

Response to accepting a 0.03% increase in the Council Tax in order to avoid efficiency saving.

Would you accept a 0.03% increase on your council tax in order to avoid this efficiency proposal?



360 comments received:

Impact

- **Reduced Choice:** Students may be limited to attending only their nearest school, removing their ability to choose based on factors such as language, quality of education, or personal preference.
- **Increased Strain on Families:** Families, particularly those with working parents, may face challenges in arranging transportation for their children, leading to increased stress and potential logistical difficulties.
- **Disproportionate Effect on the Least Well-off:** The proposal may disproportionately affect low-income families who rely on school transport services, potentially exacerbating inequalities in access to education.
- **Impact on Over-subscribed Schools:** Schools in catchment areas may become over-subscribed, leading to larger class sizes and potential strain on resources.
- **Restrictions on After-school Activities:** Longer travel times to and from school may limit students' ability to participate in after-school activities or family involvement in school events.
- **Discrimination Against Certain Groups:** The proposal may discriminate against students seeking education in faith-based schools or attending schools outside their catchment area, impacting their access to preferred educational environments.

Mitigation

- **Increased Flexibility:** Introducing more flexibility in the system to accommodate students living in rural areas or those with specific needs, ensuring they're not unduly disadvantaged by the catchment area restrictions.
- **Retaining Language Choice:** Ensuring that language choice in education is preserved, potentially by providing additional transport options for students attending schools outside their catchment area for language reasons.
- **Financial Support for Families:** Providing financial assistance or subsidies for families who may struggle to afford alternative transportation arrangements, thereby lessening the burden on low-income households.
- **Improved Resource Management:** Implementing better resource management practices, such as using technology to optimize bus routes and avoid duplication, thereby reducing costs without restricting transportation options for students.
- **Community Engagement:** Involving the community in decision-making processes to ensure that any changes to school transport provision are well-understood and that concerns are addressed effectively.

8. Public Conveniences

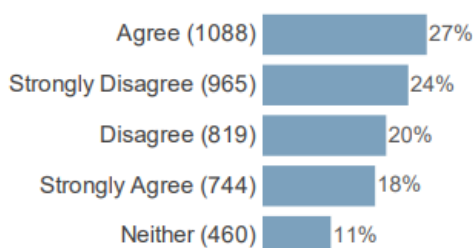
3-Year Saving: £210,000

Description: Look for opportunities to asset transfer the 14 local authority managed public conveniences to private companies or Town and Community Councils, if unsuccessful the 14 public convenience buildings facilities will be closed. This proposal excludes changing places provision. This is in addition to increasing the community toilet scheme whereby local provision of public toilets can be met by encouraging private businesses (typically food and retail outlets) to make their toilets available to members of the public.

Increase in Council Tax if not adopted: 0.19%

How strongly do you agree, or disagree, with this proposal?

Average Index Score: -0.04
Overall Rank (of 11): 9
Sample Size: 4075



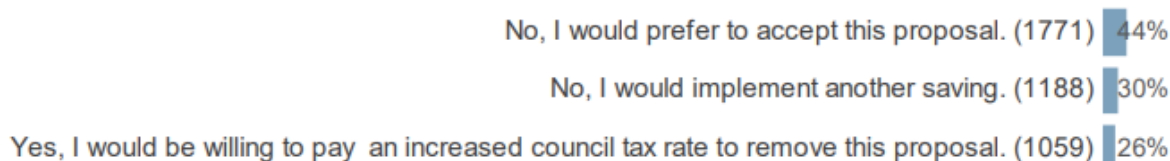
	16-24	25-44	45-64	65+	Pregnant	Mat/Pat	Female	Male	Disabled	Gender Reas.
AIS	0.31	0.09	0.03	-0.28	0.24	0.36	-0.01	-0.05	-0.24	-0.4
Sample	26	1056	1712	1057	37	47	2002	1705	753	25

	Carers	LGBTQ+	BME	Single	Religion	less £20k	£20-39k	£40k+	Welsh Language	Armed forces
AIS	-0.05	-0.19	0.03	-0.09	0.01	-0.11	0.1	-0.26	0.11	0
Sample	933	118	64	1379	1797	1267	1756	839	589	412

	CA1	CA2	CA3	CA4	CA5	CA6
AIS	-0.16	-0.13	0.04	-0.17	0.13	-0.02
Sample	832	536	1288	389	568	554

Response to accepting a 0.19% increase in the Council Tax in order to avoid efficiency saving.

Would you accept a 0.19% increase on your council tax in order to avoid this efficiency proposal? (Would you accept a 0.19% increase on your council t...)



839 comments related to the public conveniences proposal

Impact

- **Accessibility for Disabled and Elderly:** There is a consensus that disabled and elderly individuals require speedy access to toilets. Suggestions include ensuring that toilets are easily accessible and adequately equipped to meet their needs.
- **Importance of Public Toilets:** Many people emphasise the importance of public toilets as a basic human right and essential for maintaining hygiene. The closure of public toilets is viewed as detrimental, particularly for vulnerable groups such as the elderly, children, and those with medical conditions.
- **Tourism and Economic Impact:** Several individuals highlight the importance of public toilets for tourism and local businesses. Lack of adequate toilet facilities could deter visitors and have economic consequences for the region.
- **Hygiene and Maintenance:** Concerns are raised about the cleanliness and maintenance of existing public toilets. Improving the quality of facilities is seen as important to encourage usage.
- **Consideration for Vulnerable Groups:** The needs of vulnerable groups, such as those with bowel and bladder issues, are emphasised. Any decisions regarding public toilets should take into account the impact on these individuals.

Mitigation

- **Community Engagement:** There is a call for greater community involvement and consultation in decision-making processes related to public toilets.
- **Alternative Solutions:** Suggestions for addressing the issue include asset transfer to community groups, contracting services, or encouraging businesses to make their facilities available to the public.
- **Cost and Charging:** There are mixed opinions on charging for the use of public toilets. Some suggest modest charges to cover maintenance costs, while others argue that toilets should be freely accessible.

9. Schools' Delegated Budgets

3-Year Saving: £3,454,000

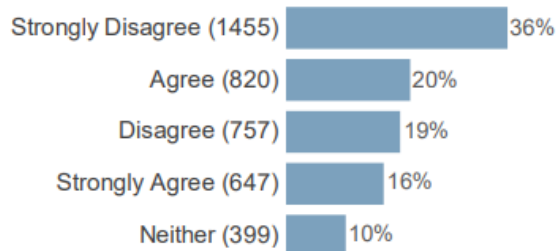
Description:

We propose that the budget delegated to schools should see a reduction in line with all other Council services. Each Governing Body manage their own school's budget, and therefore would be responsible for trying to manage with less resource. This reduction will have an impact on what our schools will be able to provide. This level of reduction in budget is estimated to be around £120 per learner.

Increase in Council Tax if not adopted: 3.08%

How strongly do you agree, or disagree, with this proposal?

Average Index Score: -0.38
Overall Rank (of 11): 11
Sample Size: 4077



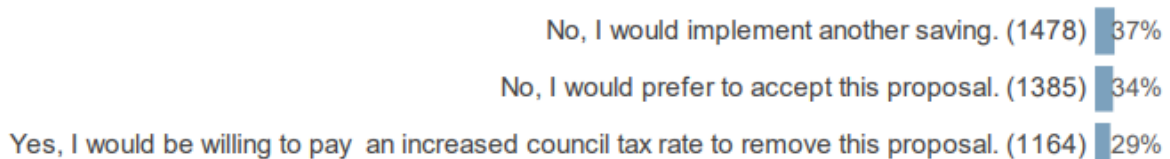
	16-24	25-44	45-64	65+	Pregnant	Mat/Pat	Female	Male	Disabled	Gender Reas.
AIS	-0.68	-0.91	-0.33	0	-0.81	-0.79	-0.67	-0.11	-0.23	-0.46
Sample	25	1062	1715	1051	37	47	2000	1711	755	26

	Carers	LGBTQ+	BME	Single	Religion	less £20k	£20-39k	£40k+	Welsh Language	Armed forces
AIS	-0.45	-0.14	-0.68	-0.29	-0.34	-0.24	-0.57	-0.26	-0.53	-0.19
Sample	933	120	65	1380	1797	1268	1761	836	590	413

	CA1	CA2	CA3	CA4	CA5	CA6
AIS	-0.44	-0.23	-0.37	-0.31	-0.46	-0.45
Sample	830	535	1291	393	571	553

Response to accepting a 3.08% increase in the Council Tax in order to avoid efficiency saving.

Would you accept a 3.08% increase on your council tax in order to avoid this efficiency proposal?



Impact

- A majority view that education should be a 'protected service'
- Emphasis was given to the impact on pupils' social and mental wellbeing, educational attainment and longer-term career opportunities
- Widespread concern that the proposal will further compound the effects of Covid on pupils' learning and development, with reference made to challenges around social integration, speech and language and pupil behaviour
- Concern in relation to larger classroom sizes and fewer teachers / teaching assistants, placing additional pressures on schools
- Proposal will undermine the deliverability of the new Curriculum for Wales
- Fear that teachers may leave the profession
- Risk of schools being placed in Special Measures
- Disinvestment in education is penny wise and pound foolish, inhibiting long-term economic growth and prosperity
- Possible impacts on the use and development of the Welsh language were highlighted – implementation of Welsh in Education Strategic Plans (WESPs)
- Some agreement that the delegated schools budget should be reviewed but not to the detriment of smaller, local schools
- An alternative view that the delegated schools budget could be expended more efficiently
- Specific mention was made of Ysgol Heol Goffa and SEN provision

Mitigation

- Review funding to support/ancillary functions such as Challenge Advisors
- Seek additional funding at a national level

10. Youth Support Service

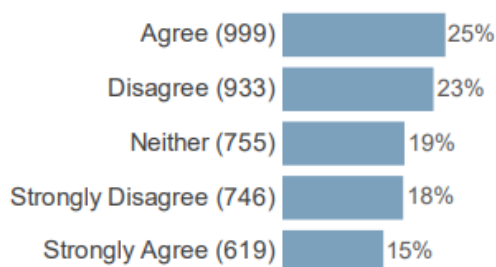
3-Year Saving: £500000

Description: The proposal is, over three years, to review how we deliver the youth support service that compliments the provision of statutory youth offending interventions. Removing the core funding for this service could lead to a restructure, alternative youth club provision, reduced school-based youth work, and reduce contributions to third sector organisations.

Increase in Council Tax if not adopted: 0.45%

How strongly do you agree, or disagree, with this proposal?

Average Index Score: -0.05
Overall Rank (of 11): 10
Sample Size: 4051



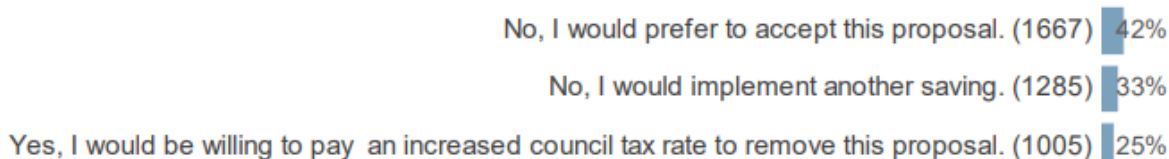
	16-24	25-44	45-64	65+	Pregnant	Mat/Pat	Female	Male	Disabled	Gender Reas.
AIS	-0.08	-0.19	-0.05	0.06	-0.08	-0.04	-0.24	0.16	-0.01	-0.12
Sample	25	1054	1697	1053	37	47	1987	1699	749	26

	Carers	LGBTQ+	BME	Single	Religion	less £20k	£20-39k	£40k+	Welsh Language	Armed forces
AIS	-0.11	0.15	-0.27	-0.08	0.01	0.05	-0.13	-0.13	-0.08	0.15
Sample	935	119	64	1376	1780	1251	1758	834	585	411

	CA1	CA2	CA3	CA4	CA5	CA6
AIS	-0.11	-0.02	0.03	-0.09	0.02	-0.06
Sample	824	537	1290	390	571	551

Response to accepting a 0.45% increase in the Council Tax in order to avoid efficiency saving.

Would you accept a 0.45% increase on your council tax in order to avoid this efficiency proposal?



Impact

- Youth services provide social, health and cultural benefits
- Widespread view that school youth workers are a valuable asset to children and young people
- Youth clubs have an important 'community' role and provide a creative outlet and safe/trusted space for young people
- Reference was made to the growing numbers of younger people with poor mental health/wellbeing
- Youth services should be preserved against a backdrop of child poverty and increasing socio-economic inequity
- Reduced provision will increase pressure and costs on other services including social care, safeguarding and policing
- A view that the loss of youth support services will be irreversible even if the economic position within the public sector improves

Mitigation

- Explore opportunities for CCC Leisure to support youth services
- Use of volunteers to sustain the service

11. Music Service

3-Year Saving: £285,000

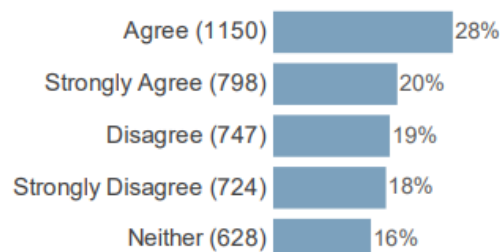
Description:

The proposal is, over three years, to remove the core funding for this service, so that it would be reliant upon Service Level Agreements with schools and any available grants. Pupils who are currently eligible for Free School Meals are supported by the Pupil Development Grant through their specific schools. This funding can support school priorities which may include music provision. The Music Service aims to continue supporting schools even though there will be a narrower offer. The service will continue to share their musical skills and talents, however there could be less of a choice for our learners and reduced support for schools.

Increase in Council Tax if not adopted: 0.25%

How strongly do you agree, or disagree, with this proposal?

Average Index Score: 0.14
Overall Rank (of 11): 7
Sample Size: 4046



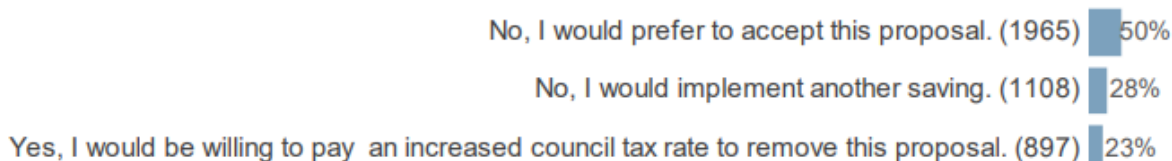
	16-24	25-44	45-64	65+	Pregnant	Mat/Pat	Female	Male	Disabled	Gender Reas.
AIS	0.08	0.02	0.2	0.14	0.13	-0.33	-0.02	0.3	0.13	0.19
Sample	26	1046	1695	1056	38	46	1976	1703	748	26

	Carers	LGBTQ+	BME	Single	Religion	less £20k	£20-39k	£40k+	Welsh Language	Armed forces
AIS	0.07	0.12	0	0.13	0.14	0.19	0.1	0.13	-0.01	0.33
Sample	919	117	64	1369	1789	1255	1745	835	585	413

	CA1	CA2	CA3	CA4	CA5	CA6
AIS	0	0.07	0.2	0.15	0.23	0
Sample	822	532	1281	393	568	822

Response to accepting a 0.25% increase in the Council Tax in order to avoid efficiency saving.

Would you accept a 0.25% increase on your council tax in order to avoid this efficiency proposal?



Impact

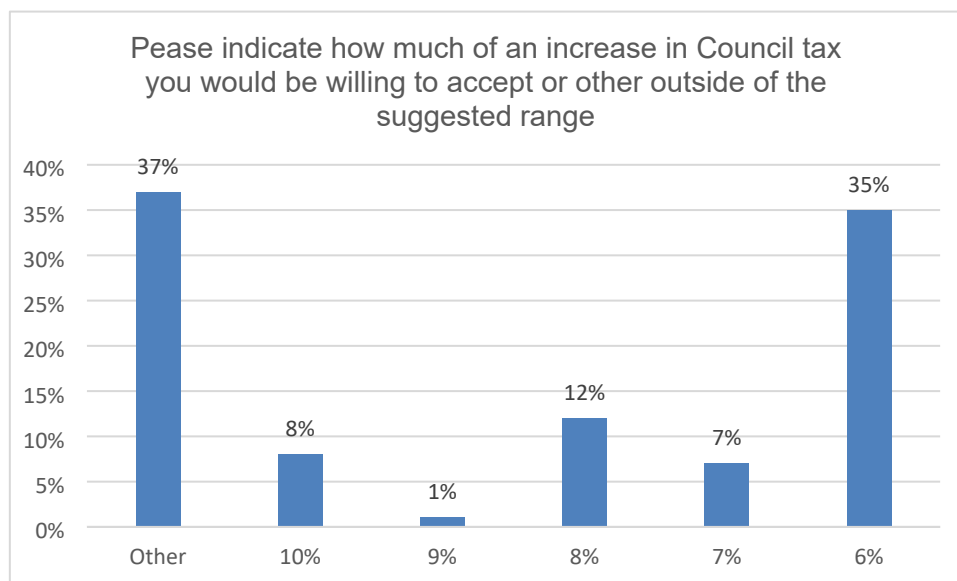
- A broad view that music fosters a more inclusive and diverse curriculum, broadening pupils' interests and transferrable skills outside of conventional academic subjects
- Support expressed for Carmarthenshire's Music Service with some respondents recalling how it has helped further their academic interests at further/high education level, launched careers in music and given rise to national performances (e.g. Eisteddfod)
- Several comments from young people against the proposal noting the confidence building, teamwork and escapism that the music service provides
- Concern that the proposal will limit the exposure of music education to young children
- Provides access to activities and experiences that many children cannot obtain at home
- Further efficiencies will jeopardise the viability and quality of the music service
- The proposal runs counter to the emphasis given to 'Expressive Arts' within the new Curriculum for Wales
- The need to support music because of its cultural significance to Wales was noted
- Concern that schools will be required to fund any deficit in provision
- Unfair on parents who already pay a contribution towards the music service
- Those in favour suggested music is not a core component of the curriculum and noted the wider savings required across education. Reasonable to ask parents to contribute to the cost of lessons
- A view that the remuneration of teachers should reflect the different roles and responsibilities of classroom and peripatetic music teachers/staff

Mitigation

- Suggestions that parents should bear more of the cost as it is a 'desirable' service, with means-tested subsidies offered to those on low incomes to ensure the charge isn't prohibitive
- Offer music tuition in after school clubs
- Learning via YouTube, social media and private tutors

Council Tax

Respondents were asked to indicate how much of an increase in Council Tax they would be willing to accept. Results are presented in the bar graph below.



Sample: 4051

<i>Of those 1,483 respondents that specified 'other'...</i>		
Range	#	%
0%	563	38.0
0.1% - 1.99%	150	10.1
2% - 3.99%	401	27.0
4% - 5.99%	272	18.3
6% - 7.99%	5	0.3
11% - 12.99%	1	0.1
13% - 14.99%	1	0.1
15%+	8	0.5
In line with Inflation	4	0.3
Reduce CT	7	0.5
N/A	10	0.7
No figure given	61	4.1

Teams from 9 secondary schools across Carmarthenshire have given their views on proposals in the Council's budget as part of an event designed to engage with young people. The Council's annual Insight event is open to all secondary schools in the county and gives pupils the chance to put themselves in the roles of the Council's Cabinet and discuss their opinions on the proposed budget. This year, pupils from years 10-13 from Ysgol y Strade, Ysgol Gyfun Emlyn, QE High, Dyffryn Taf, Ysgol Gyfun Bro Myrddin, Bryngwyn, Glan-y-Mor, Dyffryn Aman, Ysgol Bro Dinefwr took part in the event on Thursday January 25 at County Hall in Carmarthen.

The aim of the event is to introduce young people to local government and give them an insight into the challenges on a day-to-day basis. It is also an opportunity for Cabinet Members to hear pupils' views and discuss with them directly about issues that matter to them. Each school group selected a Leader and Deputy Leader which presented the teams recommendations to Cabinet members and senior staff. A summary of the key points raised are presented below.

Public conveniences – Pupils noted that public conveniences in high tourist areas should remain open and a 40p charge should be introduced to use the facilities. Maintenance of public conveniences should be undertaken as unpaid community service under supervision. Special consideration should be given for areas which do not have alternative provision.

Post-16 transport – Pupils suggested that this would be a barrier to education. They also noted that alternative provision should be provided such as safer walking routes. Pupils also noted that there should be a 'use it or lose it' strategy whereby pupils will need to continue to use the transport or they will no longer be eligible to use.

Household Waste Recycling Centres – Pupils were in favour of this proposal as this alternative means that there may not be a need to close a HWRC. Pupils noted that changing the opening days and times won't impact the recycling targets however this needs to be done using data. Pupils had some reservations regarding employees potentially losing work and the potential risk on increased fly tipping.

School's Delegated Budget - Overall, pupils agreed that savings can be made to school budgets. However, further analysis should be carried out to best suit each individual school. Pupils also noted the potential impact of this proposal such as reducing opportunities for young people and a failure to invest in schools could have a bigger future impact. Additionally, one school indicated that this cut should not be made and that schools should be given a year as an opportunity to show savings.

Music Service - Cutting music department funding risks reducing student engagement and impacting mental health. Music serves as a vital outlet for expression, particularly for those facing academic challenges. The current cost of living crisis makes out-of-school music lessons financially hard for many families. In-school music education, costing £30, is more accessible. Removing this option would add to families' financial burdens, including transportation costs and potential lost wages. Such cuts overlook the broader impact on student well-being and academic engagement.

End School Transport Appeals Panel – Pupils agreed with this proposal as it would reduce the resource needed for appeals. Pupils noted that this can reduce the stress on families reducing it to a cleaner process.

Access to blue bags and bin liners – Overall pupils agreed that sufficient bags are given in the annual roll out. In addition, a number of suggestions were made such as;

Monthly black bag collections, increase size of bags, staggering opening times of HWRCs, introduce charge for additional bin liners and increase in home sort of materials.

Staffing Budgets – Overall, pupils agreed in principle with this saving they noted that it may benefit departments by working more efficiently. Pupils also noted disadvantages of this proposal such as; increased work pressure on members of staff and standard of work reduced.

6) NOTES FROM BUDGET CONSULTATION MEETINGS

Schools Strategy Budget Forum – 23rd January 2024

RH provided a presentation to School Budget Forum members discussing the schools position in an attempt to understand the corporate position.

Provisional settlement from WG – It was expected there would be an average increase of 3.1%, however, CCC received an increase of 3.3% on the 2023-24 settlement. This has resulted in £11m of additional funding from budget reductions (where schools are a part). Following actions such as £2m vacancy factor (not in schools) being implemented there will be a total shortfall for 24/25 of £0.8m. RH raised concerns that there is currently a draft budget which is not balanced, this is an unusual situation meaning we must find more savings.

Specific grant – RH presented a slide demonstrating the value of current grants, however as other costs have increased schools will be at a disadvantage, 20% reduction in real terms. GJ stated this is an additional cut to the budget with further implications on what we have to offer pupils.

Current Validation Assumptions – Inflation is expected to be 4% next year which will impact schools from SLAs perspective.

Teachers Pay – The pay award is estimated at 4%. WG have assumed the level of teacher pay awards for September 2024 but not shared final information resulting in CCC estimating 4% based on other LAs. WG states LAs must allow for teachers pay in budgets. GM informed a motion will be raised at County Council tomorrow challenging WG on this year/last year's settlements where we are £3m short after honouring teachers' pay awards. RH stated he presented this at an ERF meeting, where unions agreed that WG needed to honour this funding gap.

PE questioned if officers are confident LAs will be able to meet the demand of unavoidable pressures? GM stated we've been in a good position for many years with managing learners and are developing local children's homes to support those in need, but this will take time. There is capital funding to support work being carried out but no revenue funding. PE stated he is cautious as there is a higher level of need with pupils while schools are facing cuts. RH added some of the money received is going to existing provisions for families with disabled children, foster care and growing the social worker capacity.

Pay assumptions - 5% was assumed for September 2023 which was not enough, and the LA needs to find the shortfall to correct for next year's budget resulting in the £3m shortfall next year with the value to be found before this year.

Energy - 1/3 of the energy needed for the financial year 25/26 has been purchased and costs are continuing to come down, helping to bridge part of the budget gap.

Teachers' pensions - There has been an increase of 5% next year which was referenced in the Ministers letter. This is expected to be fully funded.

GJ referenced the slide stating "Current year £8.8million draw on reserves is unsustainable" asking if it was after the suggested savings mentioned previously. SN

confirmed this was a current year figure, based on the October returns. GM added if the proposal to reduce schools budget goes through, we may see an additional 20 schools go into deficit.

Vacancy Factor - A proposed £2m will be applied to Council services, excluding schools. RH stated each department is responsible the vacancy factor to deliver an additional in year saving relative to staffing budget. This is done either through natural staff turnover or through deliberately holding vacancies unfilled. GM stated there is a £343,000 additional reduction in the budget on top other savings within the department.

RH stated all figures mentioned have related to year one and there are no public figures for year 2 and year 3 to date. Following work carried out by Cardiff University forecasts for 2025/26 and 2026/27 were presented, providing modelled figures but these are the best we have at present to inform future considerations as the scale of issue not going away.

Scale of cuts in future years were highlighted noting the department have a large shortfall for years 2 and 3, and the scale of uncertainty on pay awards was highlighted and a balanced budget at present cannot be presented.

Key risks – It is unclear what the pay awards will be for 2024, use of reserves in schools which has been significant this year and won't be possible for many next year, Children's Services pressures, pensions and the 800k shortfall position.

The consultation period is still open with approx. 3,000 responses to date. RH will be attending the Education Employee Relations Forum next week and a final budget will be in front of Carmarthenshire Council on 28th February 2024.

PE informed of an article in Wales Online, discussing Council debts. Members were informed by GM and SN that the article focuses on borrowing, ignoring the different forms of funding within LAs. RH provided context on Carmarthenshire borrowing position stating, as of March 2023 there is \$411m of outstanding borrowing ranging from £20m borrowed last year at low rates through to loans taken out in 1970s.

Members thanked shared with RH for presenting the budget information clearly.

PJ raised concerns about costs and additional vulnerability with a need to find more internal solutions as opposed to "going to market" as this is the more cost efficient. TS informed discussions have started in CASH about making efficiencies around sharing staff knowledge and services.

GM gave a presentation on departmental budgets stating we are fully funding teachers' pay for next year and growth funding bids were made on behalf of schools, but these were not successful. Members were reminded the department (including schools) needs to find almost £4.8m in savings. Policy proposals are being consulted on and managerial proposals can be handled internally. All will have an impact on children and education.

GM continued explaining £3.454m equates to an estimated £120 per pupil reduction although this may be higher. Youth support and music services are not statutory services, but it may be argued they have benefits to pupils. These services are co funded (council funding and grant funded).

Proposed policy cuts came to £335k leaving over £1m on managerial savings to be made. This includes a review of the middle tier, moving from multiple grants to one grant with four pillars. SN clarified grants moving forward will include equity, welsh language, reform as school standards. WG have stated the funding pot is the same and there will be a national formula with terms and conditions being developed with the aim for less bureaucracy and grants. If there are no regional grants, the money comes direct to LA putting pressure on our teams. GM informed the Early Years

Education component is covered by a grant which has allowed this funding to cover gaps and overspends in previous years.

Relating to savings within catering, work is to be carried out around secondary schools catering costs and offer. PE stated changes to the breakfast provision has been raised before and it cannot be managed by HTs when there isn't the capacity and staffing. SD explained how this proposal has multiple options including charges to parents and catering providing the food with schools providing the care. PE raised concerns that schools are taking more work on with less support. SD informed pupils are entitled to the free breakfast and many parents have become reliant on the service that. GJ understands this is a core offer, but schools can't be all things to all people, requesting further guidance from LAs on what they should offer. GJ raised the section 52 document previously reviewed drawing attention to items he feels are not fit for purpose such as ALN funding and how it is shared with schools. He would like to see more of understanding how we have arrived at the figures presented within section 52 requesting an information map breakdown.

ACTION: Explain rationalisation map of supplements to next meeting.

PE added transparency is needed on how money is allocated. Suggestion made by GM to use the meeting on 27th February to look at supplements and rational. SN it would need to be proposed on basis that it is £3.4m for budget process for budgets to go out to schools early March a meeting on the 27th of February would be too late.

Calendars to be checked to see if there is a date earlier than 27th February available for next Schools Budget Forum Meeting.

Next meeting to focus on supplements.

GJ expressed it is key to collaborate with individuals informing the HT at Heol Goffa is willing to share information with group members. GM wishes to respond to issues raised by Heol Goffa first and a meeting with Chair of Governors and HT has been arranged.

JJ reminded that this is not a short term issue with challenges faced for quite some time in the future. The challenges of the overall footprint in Carmarthenshire have previously been raised and JJ questioned whether work relating to this is ongoing? GM informed this is agenda item 4. A strategy document is going to Cabinet next Monday which is key to drive how schools work in the future. A workshop is being held tomorrow to review challenges and addressing primary school footprint, Cllr GD added the footprint is something we have to look at, thanking all members for their hard work and sharing understanding that they are all under pressure.

PE questioned the timescale for the strategy? GM stated the timescale detail is to be decided by end of March and a list of schools who will be affected will be developed. Formal discussions will take place with schools once the strategy is confirmed. GM concluded stating there is a draft of schools which needs to be confirmed by Cabinet.

Giving up posts in data and business support will provide savings that are additional to the vacancy factor. Management structures are being reviewed both in schools and in the LA with most departments are struggling to find their savings. Children's Services have an overspend of £6.5m and changes are being implemented to meet this.

GJ raised whether suggested savings will be communicated with HTs? GM confirmed that once final decisions are made, information will be shared. The demand on officers is the same in spite of the cuts that are taking place. TS stated cutting leadership teams in schools is not an option, with more work than ever being carried out. The leadership teams are carrying out tasks which were never the preserve of teachers/senior leaders.

RH informed when the overall picture was presented Councillors on Monday, the Chief Executive stressed that we can't expect people to help out and carry out tasks which are not in their remit. JJ asked if the department has scope to develop information on what schools can share with parents? Suggestion for a public message regarding what schools can and can't do (following up to what was done in CASH). GM stated at the HT conference on 7th Feb, there is a section on budget in the morning. This may be an opportunity to workshop what schools have to deliver, the core functions on what we deliver at school level, where additions such as breakfast club will need careful consideration on how to move forward. Cllr GD commented, looking at 6.5% increase in rates this year, it would be unpalatable to increase further although some LAs in Wales looking at 15%. This is going to be tough but needs to happen. LIJ concluded the conversation stating schools can't do more with less, this includes school sports, events, courses. There is a need to be more strategic and selective on what we can provide.

Corporate Employee Relations Forum (CERF) Meeting 22nd JANUARY 2024

Budget update - Randal Hemingway, Head of Financial Services

RH attended to provide an update on the budget consultations and share as much information as possible about where CCC are at this current time.

Following the Welsh Government's below-inflation funding settlement of 3.3%, announced on December 20, Carmarthenshire County Council needs to bridge a shortfall of over £27million in its 2024/25 budget.

Welsh Government acknowledge that they faced the "most stark and painful budget choices for Wales in the devolution era" as they prepared their draft budget, which includes the all-important Revenue Support Grant (RSG) allocated to local authorities. The 3.3% rise in the RSG, which makes up around three-quarters of our funding, falls well short of the contribution needed by the Council to maintain services as they are presently. Most of the remaining income, amounting to about a quarter of the total annual revenue budget, comes from the Council Tax, which raises over £100million a year.

A total of 11 budget proposals are presented for consideration. These will be considered alongside more than 100 detailed managerial proposals, such as procurement arrangements, staffing structures and internal and back-office functions.

What are the pressures:

- Cost of workforce will be £15m more than this year.
- Assumption was made that the pay award would match inflation, but we were £3m short in the pay budget due to increased offer for teachers.
- Education minister had said that it would be funded by Welsh Government, but it was only partially funded this year and not at all going forward
- **Pensions** - increase in employer contributions for teachers by 5% (28.68%). Teachers base pay is around £70m so that's a £3.5m pressure. Our assumption is that it's funded but this hasn't been settled at a national level.
- £1.18m is for fire levy.
- **Children Services** - CCC had lowest cost of any LA children's services historically. £6m overspend within service, compared to £3.5m last year. Budget of £5.5m into next year. Set aside £2m for time limited cost. No overspend in 2022 due to covid grants. New property purchased with 4 placement space. Rhyd y gors to be converted to emergency & assessment unit with capacity for 4 children for 3 month

period. Depending on how this goes, we may look at another site. £15m of pressures.

Bridging the gap:

- 100 specific reduction proposals
- £2m vacancy factor - doesn't apply to schools, for individual departments. This is sometimes done with natural turnover. Proposal mitigates removal of public facing services and redundancies. Very mindful that this could put more pressure on our employees, and that realistically it could mean some services could take a bit longer than we aspire to.

ME: Do elected members know the impact? Now seeing it for themselves, everyone here has a role to enable people to do their jobs. These are cuts, not savings. I have asked for a meeting with Jan Coles (Head of Children's Services), to address the watering down of the service, workforce don't know their future. Cuts are passed on to schools.

RH: Within £10.8m, £3.5m is a reduction for schools. Schools had additional funding during covid e.g. they had sickness paid for a couple of years by Welsh government. Those Funding streams are not part of their recurrent budget and expenditure needs to match the budget situation. Chris Moore (Director of Corporate Services) has presented to headteachers, RH to chairs of governors

ZC: Any money in the school reserves?

RH: CCC reserves peaked in 21/22. The school's forecast is £8.8m draw for this year. From £11m reserves would drop to £2m, they need to look at what they're spending on. There isn't a vacancy factor for schools. Bridgend is looking at 5% reduction on schools for comparison, and other LAs are considering.

ME: previously a comment has been made about why do we need TA's. Hopefully headteachers have been spoken to, and they've said exactly why. Education forum said too much pressure on teachers which is affecting children. I agree that Welsh Government should cough up.

RH: £3m saving on energy. Bought almost all of our energy. 6.5% increase in council tax. 1.7m from emptying second homes premium coming in April. Our budget isn't balanced now, we are £800k short.

PT: Council tax increase in Pembrokeshire Council could be between 7.5%-25%.

RH: from publicly available figures, CCC likely to be towards the lower end range of Council tax increases.

ME: LA has reached a point where they can't generate income because of lack of resources.

PT: We're going to have less but there is a public expectation to do more. We are doing what we can e.g. Sundry debtors to generate £1.5m by collecting debt.

ME: Increase charges in a cost-of-living crisis ?

JJ: *It's a vicious circle, charging people to park will lead to illegal parking.*

ZC: *Can you clarify using agency staff*

PT: *The cost of agency is approximately £12m, £8m of this spend being within schools. We'd like to pilot an in-house agency, using casual staff as we could make savings here.*

JJ: *there's a big chunk of spend going on agency, agency T+C's aren't very good*

ZC: *I have concerns around protecting employees' hours etc. Does this include agency teachers?*

RY: *There is an improved choice of agencies for schools through the National Procurement Service (NPS) but Welsh Government would prefer schools/councils to employ.*

HM: *The in-house provision would need to be attractive, how would you make it attractive. It's a useful initiative though.*

PH: *Can you explain the £2m vacancy factor?*

RH: *Yes, the NJC pay bill is £170m, £2m is around 1%. Up to individual areas how to implement. E.g. in my service Area of highest staff turnover in my area is creditors. The natural turnover in creditors will contribute towards the authorities £2m.*

JJ: *This would put pressure on the staff, which results in sickness.*

ME: *Environmental Health team has been reduced by half. So, the quality has been halved too.*

RH: *Obviously, you'd always want a full complement of staff, but this will make an impact and mitigate something much worse such as cutting a service or having to make redundancies.*

JJ: *More pressure on staff. Sickness review meetings have trebled and mainly down to stress. Any redundancies?*

RH: *Not a route we've gone down.*

PT: *We do have a severance policy, but we are not at the point where we need to make people redundant. Based on our age profile, it is also expensive.*

JJ: *Lower-level staff wouldn't cost as much.*

RH: *It's quite easy to get into high figures with long service for middle tier officers. Need to consider if the employee is going, is the work going too, what impact would that have on team surrounding them?*

PH: *There is a disconnect between school redundancies and corporate redundancies.*

PT: I don't disagree, even more challenging for schools with relatively small budgets, their scope for cuts is limited

RH: *Looking at figures from Cardiff University at what figures could look like for next 2 years, next year will be hard.*

ME: *Agree, this is the political message at TU conference*

PT: *Any mention of local government reorganisation?*

ME: *No, don't think they'd want that right now.*

RY: *When does consultation period close ?*

RH: *Sunday 12pm for submissions re the budget consultations.*

7) MINUTES OF SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETINGS

CORPORATE PERFORMANCE & RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

31 JANUARY 2024

The Committee considered the Corporate Revenue Budget Strategy Consultation 2024/25 to 2026/27, which provided a current view of the revenue budget for 2024/25 together with indicative figures for the 2025/26 and 2026/27 financial years. The Committee took into account the provisional settlement used by Welsh Government on the 20th December, 2023 which was the latest date ever to be provided.

Members were reminded that the report had been considered by Cabinet at its meeting on 15th January 2024 and members of the Committee had recently attended consultation events which had provided an opportunity to analyse and seek clarification on various aspects of the budget.

The report highlighted that funding had not been allocated for either Teachers' or Firefighters' pension increases, as it had not been worked through Westminster and Welsh Government. Whilst this is assumed to be a nil impact on our funding position, this was considered a significant risk until formally confirmed, with a value of circa £4million.

The Committee were informed that there was no additional funding being provided to meet the inherent budget shortfall going forward as a result of either the uplift in Teachers pay (set by Welsh Government), nor the 2023 NJC pay award (set by national pay bargaining) and was the most challenging settlement since devolution.

The Committee were advised that the final settlement was expected to be published by Welsh Government on the 27th February, 2024 alongside the Welsh Government budget, the day before full council meets to agree the final budget.

The Committee thereupon considered the following detailed budget information appended to the Strategy, relevant to Corporate and Performance Scrutiny:-

- Appendix A** – Corporate Budget Strategy 2024/25 to 2026/27
- Appendix A(i)** – Efficiency summary for the Chief Executive and Corporate Services departments
- Appendix A(ii)** – Growth Pressures summary for the Chief Executive and Corporate Services departments
- Appendix B** – Budget monitoring report for the Chief Executive and Corporate Services departments
- Appendix C** – Charging Digest for the Chief Executive and Corporate Services departments

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

- In response to a query as to why the alternative scenario was chosen by the Authority for the Medium Term Financial Plan, the Director of Resources confirmed that this was the most realistic option out of the two options offered, due to the uncertainty of elections for both the UK Government and Welsh Government combined with a new Welsh First Minister.
- In response to a query, the Committee were advised that the Authority has been pro-active in informing property owners of the increase in premiums to both second and empty homes. This increase was approved by Cabinet in December, 2023 with a review of the policy taking place during 2024. Cabinet will consider further potential increases in premiums. The income received will be built into next year's budget, with a report to Cabinet for consideration of the tax base during the autumn term.
- The Committee were advised that the loan to the Scarlets had matured and a meeting between parties has been arranged during February to work to an acceptable outcome.
- In response to a query, members were advised that the education budget forecasts were monitored throughout the year and due to new expenditure pressures, an indicative sum of £15.4million has been allocated across departments, as identified in appendix B of the report. The Committee were informed that the most significant area of pressures was within Children's services.
- The Committee were advised that a 4% increase for staff salaries was a realistic assumption, given that the rate of inflation was decreasing.
- It was noted by the Committee, that due to lack of information provided from schools regarding individual reserves, future forecasts could not be assumed.
- The Committee were informed that Marketing and Media officers were looking into providing budget consultation feedback to the public.
- In response to a query regarding an increase to Delta Wellbeing fees, officers confirmed that the SLA is now serving more organisations and other authorities including Carmarthenshire. There has been an increase of staff, rising from 40 to 100 and changes to technology.

UNANAMOUSLY RESOLVED that:

- 4.1 the Revenue Budget Strategy Consultation 2024/25 to 2026/27 be received
- 4.2 the Charging Digest detailed in Appendix C to the report, be endorsed.

**PLACE, SUSTAINABILITY & CLIMATE CHANGE
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

30 JANUARY 2024

[Note: Councillor S. Godfrey-Coles declared a personal interest in this item. She remained in the meeting, took part in the deliberations and voting thereof.]

The Committee considered a report on the Council's Revenue Budget Strategy 2024/25 to 2026/27, as endorsed by the Cabinet for consultation purposes at its meeting held on the 15th January 2024. The report provided Members with an outlook of the Revenue Budget for 2024/2025 together with indicative figures for 2025/2026 and 2026/2027 financial years based on officers' projections of spending requirements and took account of the provisional settlement issued by Welsh Government on the 20th December 2023.

The Cabinet Member for Resources, in presenting the report informed the Committee that the announced provisional settlement represented an average increase of 3.1% across Wales on the 2023/24 settlement, with Carmarthenshire's increase being 3.3% (£11.0m) thereby taking the Aggregate External Finance to £349.441m for 2024/25. While the settlement was significantly above the initial indicative figure of a 3.4% increase and provided some £15.5m more than the Council's original assumption, the Welsh Government had recognised the increased figure would still not be sufficient to meet inflationary pressures facing councils, pay awards and fuel price increases and difficult decisions would need to be made.

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

- **Appendix A(i)** – Efficiency summary for the Place, Sustainability and Climate Change Services;
- **Appendix A(ii)** – Growth Pressures summary for the for the Place and Infrastructure Service;
- **Appendix B** – Budget monitoring report for the Place, Sustainability and Climate Change Services;
- **Appendix C** – Charging Digest for the Place, Sustainability and Climate Change Services.

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

- It was commented that this report demonstrated an unprecedented situation and highlights the seriousness of the situation where it was getting increasingly difficult to find areas of saving without impacting on services. The Head of Financial Services stated that this was the first time in his career that he had reported an unbalanced draft budget.
- Several strong concerns were raised in regard to the Highway maintenance Services which identified a £100,000 efficiency saving by reducing surface dressing. The Committee had recently written to the Welsh Government to express its concerns in the lack of funding to maintain the roads within Carmarthenshire and the proposal was an additional sacrifice in maintaining the road network.
- In response to a concern raised in relation to the proposal to cease routine mechanical sweeping of rural roads and will only be provided on a reactive basis, the Director of Place and Infrastructure stated that drainage was key in resolving a lot of issues
- A number of concerns relating to the efficiency saving proposals in regard to the following areas were raised:-
 - Surface dressing
 - Change in mechanical sweeping of rural roads from routine to a reactive basis
 - Deterioration of the road conditions

The Director of Place and Infrastructure explained that the purpose of surface dressing was to intervene in a timely manner to extend the lifespan of the road structure. It was acknowledged that unfortunately, the current budget constraints did not conform to long term asset management. Currently, within the restricted budget a programme of surface dressing was in place which was prioritised according to the condition reported and what the budget allowed. In terms of the inspection regime regarding potholes, in principle the line of defence would be to inspect, log and repair potholes accordingly. In addition, it was emphasised that whilst drainage was key in resolving many issues, it was reported that damage occurred would be managed through routine inspection regimes and reporting methods and the method of repair would be based on the severity of the damage and prioritised accordingly.

In response to a concern raised in that should the Committee support the efficiency savings which would be at a detriment to road users potentially exposing Members to be liable, the Cabinet Member for Resources stated that ultimately it would be the responsibility of the UK and Welsh Governments. Due to the seriousness of the situation, Committee Members were informed that the Cabinet Member for Resources would be proposing to raise the current £600k capital assigned to highway maintenance to £2m towards addressing the more serious road conditions.

- Reference was made to the introduction of carparking charges to carparks within the County which currently were free of charge. Concerns were raised

that introducing car parking charges on free car parks could have a detrimental impact on local businesses. The Cabinet Member for Waste, Transport and Infrastructure Services stated that a review was currently underway which would consider free car parks and the impact of introducing car parking charges on the locality. A final report would be presented to Scrutiny in due course. It was commented that the carpark charges within Carmarthenshire Council owned carpark was cheaper than neighbouring Authorities.

It was proposed that as part of the consultation, Cabinet consider the proposal on car parking charges be reviewed based upon the rationale for individual locality free car parking provision. This was duly seconded.

- Reference was made to the proposal that learners aged 16 to 18 attending school or college would no longer be provided with free transport, which would mean that they would have to make their own arrangements. Strong concern was expressed that this proposal would have a detrimental impact on the age group being able to attend college potentially affecting their life chances. The Head of Environmental Infrastructure explained that the proposal was set to be introduced in 2025/26, in the meantime a full scoping exercise would take place and that a report could be presented upon completion.

Therefore, it was proposed that Cabinet reconsider the proposed efficiency saving to remove the provision free transport for learners aged 16 to 18 attending school or college. This was duly seconded.

RESOLVED:

- 6.1 the 2024/25 to 2026/27 Revenue Budget Strategy be received;**
- 6.2 the proposals for delivery of efficiency savings as identified in Appendix A(i) be received subject to the comments raised by the Committee being considered as part of the consultation with a focus on the following:-**
 - **Increase the funds made available to highway maintenance;**
 - **To reconsider and review the introduction of carpark charges based upon the rationale for individual locality free car parking provision;**
 - **to reconsider the proposal to cease free school/college transport for 16 to 18 year olds;**
- 6.3 the Charging Digest for the Place and Infrastructure Services, as detailed in Appendix C to the report, be endorsed;**

HEALTH & SOCIAL SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

25 JANUARY 2024

The Committee considered the Council's Revenue Budget Strategy 2024/25 to 2026/27 which provided a current view of the revenue budget for 2024/25 together with indicative figures for the 2025/26 and 2026/27 financial years. The report was based on officers' projections of spending requirements and took account of the

provisional settlement issued by Welsh Government on 20th December 2023 - the latest date this had ever been provided.

It was emphasised 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 15th January 2024 and members of the Committee had attended recent consultation events which had provided an opportunity to analyse and seek clarification on various aspects of the budget.

The Committee was advised that the final settlement was expected to be published by Welsh Government on 27th February 2024 alongside the Welsh Government budget, the day before full council meets to agree the final budget.

The report indicated that no funding had been allocated for either Teachers' or Firefighters' pension increases, as this mechanism had not yet been worked through between Westminster and Welsh Government. Whilst this was assumed to be a nil impact on the funding position, this was considered a significant risk until formally confirmed, with a value of c. £4m.

The Ministers letter stated that all available funding had been provided, and Local Authorities "must therefore accommodate" costs such as the September 2024 Teachers pay deal, although there was no clarity on what has been assumed.

Members were reminded that no additional funding had been provided to meet the budget shortfall going forward as a result of either the uplift in Teachers pay (set by Welsh Government), nor the 2023 NJC pay award (set by national pay bargaining). Welsh Government recognised that this was the most challenging settlement since devolution.

The Cabinet Member for Resources advised that Wales was to receive an extra £25m for public services off the back of the boost received by English councils aimed to tackle their cash crisis. It was hoped that some of this additional funding would be distributed to Local Authorities.

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

- **Appendix A(i)** – Efficiency summary for Health and Social Services
- **Appendix A(ii)** – Growth Pressures summary for Health & Social Services
- **Appendix B** – Budget monitoring report for Health and Social Services
- **Appendix C** – Charging Digest for Health and Social Services

Several questions were raised to which officers responded. The main matters were as follows:

- In response to a query regarding the £2m drawn from reserves for Children Services, assurance was provided that it was correct to apply this funding and that it was anticipated that the introduction of in-house facilities would result in the reduction for the need to go market for 3rd party placements. On this basis

it was expected that there would be no recurrent need for this draw down facility.

- In reference to the Charging Digest officers confirmed that the average increase in charges had been calculated to be around 10% uplift that took into account the cost of providing home care had increased substantially.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that:

- 6.1 The 2024/25 – 2026/27 Revenue Budget Strategy Consultation be received;**
- 6.2 The Charging Digest detailed in Appendix C to the report, be endorsed.**

COMMUNITIES, HOMES & REGENERATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

26 JANUARY 2024

(NOTE: Councillor H. Shepardson, having earlier declared an interest in this item, remained in the meeting during its consideration)

The Committee considered a report on the Council's Revenue Budget Strategy 2024/25 to 2026/27, as endorsed by the Executive Board for consultation purposes at its meeting held on the 15th January 2024. The report provided Members with the current view of the Revenue Budget for 2024/2025 together with indicative figures for the 2025/2026 and 2026/2027 financial years based on officers' projections of spending requirements and took account of the provisional settlement issued by Welsh Government on the 20th December 2023.

The Committee was informed that the announced provisional settlement represented an average increase of 3.1% across Wales on the 2023/24 settlement, with Carmarthenshire's increase being 3.3% (£11.0m) thereby taking the Aggregate External Finance to £349,441m for 2024/25. While the settlement was marginally above the Council's planning figure of a 3.0% increase and provided £0.9m more than the Council's original assumption, and was to be welcomed, the inflationary, pay awards and other service pressure increases far exceeded the funding provided. In context, the additional budgets required in 2024/25 to meet the costs of pay awards alone totalled £15m,

Whilst the budget proposals assumed the full delivery of all savings proposals, it was noted further work would be required to develop the cost reductions for the 2025/26 and 2026/27 financial years to be able to maintain the current Budget Strategy and level of Council tax.

It was noted that given the current risks around the Budget Strategy and the ongoing inflationary backdrop, together with other budgetary pressures, the proposed Council Tax increase for 2024/25 had been set at 6.5% to mitigate reductions to critical services. However, the strategy contained a shortfall of £801k which would need to be addressed in order for the Council to set a balanced budget. In years 2 and 3, the

financial picture remained uncertain and, as such, modelled indicative Council Tax rises of 4% and 3% had been made purely for planning purposes and sought to strike a balance with budget reductions. Those proposals would be considered by the Council in setting the Council Tax level for 2024/25 at its meeting on the 28th February, 2024. Additionally, as the Welsh Government final settlement figure was not due to be announced until the 27th February, 2024 any amendments required to be considered to the budget strategy as a result of that announcement would need to be considered by Council on the 28th February.

It was further noted that following the UK Government's decision to provide additional funding to English Local Authorities, it was hoped the Welsh Government would receive an additional £28m through the Barnett Formula and representations were being made for that additional funding to be provided to Welsh Local Authorities.

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

The following questions/issues were raised on the report:

- With regard to the budget proposals to increase income within leisure services, the Head of Leisure confirmed they predominantly related to increasing activity and the type of products offered to broaden the income base as opposed to increasing prices. However, while the leisure budget had been set with a 4% price increase, careful consideration had been given to the various rationale behind the increases and the potential impact those could have on the ability of some residents to pay, and that in some cases prices had not been increased. Additionally, the Council operated a concessionary policy to offer reduced rates to those most in need but that needed to be reviewed to achieve consistency of application.
- In response to a question on the proposed reduction in agency use within the Council's Residential Care Homes, the Head of Housing and Public Protection advised that while the Council used agency staff in its residential homes, it was felt the establishment of an in-house agency could be operated at lower costs. In that regard, a pilot scheme would be trialled in the four in-house homes in Llanelli from April to July 2024 and, if successful, could be extended throughout the rest of the in-house portfolio across the county and, potentially, extended to include domiciliary care. The scheme would be undertaken on a staggered approach to ensure the proposed savings were achieved. It was also confirmed discussions had been held with the City and County of Swansea which had established a similar in-house agency, and it was felt the proposed in-house provision could be both successful and operated at lower cost than at present.

- With regard to the proposal for the re-alignment of grants and other funding sources to support front line posts and other services, the Head of Housing and Public Protection confirmed it was felt the re-alignment complied with grant conditions and would be sustainable for a number of years to protect front line services.
- The Head of Place and Sustainability in response to a question on reductions in the flood defence budget advised the Council could make bids to the Welsh Government for additional funding and that, subject to confirmation, it had secured funding for the current year to offset the reduction to the core budget.
- With regard to the impact of covid on leisure service, the Head of Leisure confirmed that while some services had recovered quicker than others, the overall recovery was positive with the service being back on track, with growth in some areas. However, it had to be appreciated a lot of other factors such as global fuel prices, instability, inflation and the cost of living also impacted on leisure activity.
- It was confirmed that while the budget included a £2m provision as a vacancy factor to help bridge the budget shortfall by for example normal staff turnover and holding vacant posts empty to help achieve target savings, the proposals were considered to be manageable.

RESOLVED THAT IT BE RECOMMENDED TO THE CABINET/COUNCIL THAT: -

- 4.1 The 2024/25 – 2026/27 Revenue Budget Strategy Consultation be received.**
- 4.2 The Charging Digests for the Regeneration, Leisure, Place and Sustainability and Non HRA Services, as detailed in Appendix C to the report, be endorsed.**

**EDUCATION, YOUNG PEOPLE & THE WELSH LANGUAGE SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE**

31 JANUARY 2024

[NOTE: Councillors B.W. Jones, M.J.A. Lewis and E. Skinner, having earlier declared an interest in this item remained in the meeting during its consideration.]

The Committee considered a report on the Council's Revenue Budget Strategy 2024/25 to 2026/27 and which provided Members with the current view of the revenue budget for 2024/2025, together with indicative figures for the 2025/2026 and 2026/2027 financial years. The report was based on officers' projections of spending requirements and took account of the provisional settlement issued by Welsh Government (WG) on 20th December 2023.

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 15 January 2024 and members of the Committee had attended recent consultation events which

had provided an opportunity to analyse and seek clarification on various aspects of the budget.

The Committee was informed that the announced provisional settlement represented an average increase of 3.1% across Wales on the 2023/24 settlement, with Carmarthenshire's increase being 3.3% (£11.0m). While the settlement was marginally above the Council's planning figure of a 3.0% increase and provided £0.9m more than the Council's original assumption, and was to be welcomed, the inflationary, pay awards and other service pressure increases far exceeded the funding provided. In context, the additional budgets required in 2024/25 to meet the costs of pay awards alone totalled £15m. In particular, no additional funding had been provided to meet the inherent budget shortfall going forward as a result of either the uplift in Teachers pay set by Welsh Government, nor the 2023 NJC pay award set by national pay bargaining.

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. The Cabinet Member for Resources explained that the budget proposals included a £3.5m saving applied in this regard, which was consistent with the level of savings required of other areas of council services. The Cabinet Member for Resources was however pleased to report that the planned reduction to the Recruit Recover Retain Standards (RRRS) grant had been reversed, which would provide partial mitigation.

An overview of the updated position on the current financial outlook, as set out at section 4 of the report, was provided to the Committee which took account of the provisional settlement and also other recent validation changes.

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

The Cabinet Member for Resources advised that Welsh Government was to receive an extra £25m funding for public services through the Barnett Formula following the boost received by English councils aimed to tackle their cash crisis. It was hoped that some of this additional funding would be distributed to Local Authorities.

In closing, the Committee was advised that the final budget proposals would be presented to County Council on the 28 February 2024, one day following the finalisation of Welsh Government's budget.

The issues/observations raised by the Committee were addressed as follows:-

Concerns were raised that the mechanism for funding the Teachers' and Firefighters' pension increases had not yet been worked through between Westminster and Welsh

Government. The Head of Financial Services reported that while it was assumed that this matter would have a nil impact on the Authority's funding position given the aspiration to resolve the matter within the current financial year, it did, nevertheless, represent a significant financial risk to the Authority until such time as formal confirmation was received. Furthermore, should confirmation be received at national level, a risk remained in respect of the distribution of funding amongst Local Authorities.

In response to a query regarding the Youth Support Service & Participation, it was confirmed that as a non-statutory provision, the proposals comprised a 10% reduction to operational costs and a reduction in core funding over a 3 year period until such time as the provision would be reliant on grant funding. The Director of Education and Children's Services recognised the potential long term adverse impact upon children and young people and emphasised that the proposals were based upon the requirement to meet efficiency savings.

The Director of Education and Children's Services, in response to a query, clarified that the transfer of responsibility and funding for the school breakfast provision to schools would lead to a more effective and efficient service, with opportunities for schools to generate income. A consultation exercise was scheduled to commence imminently.

Reference was made to the efficiencies required within the delegated schools budget whereby a concern was raised that the impact of the level of reduction per learner would be felt greater within smaller schools. An assurance was provided to the Committee that discussions were ongoing in an effort to mitigate the severity of the impact on smaller schools; it was however highlighted that any mitigation in this regard would result a greater impact on larger schools.

Reference was made to the proposed review of primary schools' footprint to derive efficiency savings of £200k for 2025/26 whereby a Member enquired as to the potential number of school closures that would be required to achieve the efficiency savings. It was explained that a thorough review of all Carmarthenshire schools was ongoing, however the closure of smaller schools would only derive savings in terms of site costs which was estimated to be in the region of £50k-60k per school.

Following a request for further information regarding the schools which showed a deficit budgetary position, the Director of Education and Children's Services confirmed that 4 secondary schools and 32 primary schools were currently showing a deficit. It was anticipated that the number of budgetary deficits would be increased in 2024/25 which further highlighted the need for schools to collaborate to identify potential sharing of resources.

In response to concerns raised, the Head of Strategy and Learner Support provided an overview of the detrimental impact that would be incurred as a result of further reductions to the Welsh Language Support and Data & Education Systems budgets. It was acknowledged by Members that staffing cuts to these areas would lead to a reduced service provision and pose a risk in terms of the Authority's ability to deliver the requirements of the Welsh In Education Strategic Plan and accordingly, grant funding opportunities were being explored.

In considering the savings proposals reference was made to a recent televised programme which related to schools in urgent need of repair, and which included one school within the county. An assurance was therefore sought that the proposed

budgetary cuts would not impact upon the timescales for the delivery of repairs to be carried out in schools to ensure a safe and positive learning environment for pupils. The Head of Access to Education duly clarified that the school in question related to a design issue rather than an issue of neglect of maintenance and the Authority was monitoring the situation and exploring ways for the issue to be addressed on a longer-term basis. It was acknowledged that the budget provision did not meet all costs incurred by some schools in respect of repair and maintenance of buildings, however an assurance was provided that repairs and maintenance were prioritised according to health and safety requirements within the budget available.

The Committee expressed concern and dissatisfaction that the cumulative deficit balances in future years remained a significant risk to the Authority, however there was little room for manoeuvre in light of the funding allocation from Welsh Government. In particular, the nationally agreed teachers' pay uplift, which had not been funded by Government, placed a significant additional pressure on Local Authorities and would result in consequential implications for school budgets, which are already extremely tight. In light of the aforementioned concerns, the Committee felt that written representations should be conveyed to the Welsh Government and / or HM Treasury as part of its consultation process on the Spring Budget 2024.

RESOLVED that:

- 4.1 The 2024/25 – 2026/27 Revenue Budget Strategy Consultation be received;**
- 4.2 The Charging Digest detailed in Appendix C to the report be endorsed;**
- 4.3 The Chair to submit written representations to Welsh Government and / or HM Treasury to express the Committee's concern and dissatisfaction in respect of the proposed budget allocation for schools and teachers pay awards.**

**EDUCATION, YOUNG PEOPLE & THE WELSH LANGUAGE SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE**

31 JANUARY 2024

The Committee considered the Corporate Revenue Budget Strategy Consultation 2024/25 to 2026/27, which provided a current view of the revenue budget for 2024/25 together with indicative figures for the 2025/26 and 2026/27 financial years. The Committee took into account the provisional settlement used by Welsh Government on the 20th December, 2023 which was the latest date ever to be provided.

Members were reminded that the report had been considered by Cabinet at its meeting on 15th January 2024 and members of the Committee had recently attended consultation events which had provided an opportunity to analyse and seek clarification on various aspects of the budget.

The report highlighted that funding had not been allocated for either Teachers' or Firefighters' pension increases, as it had not been worked through Westminster and Welsh Government. Whilst this is assumed to be a nil impact on our funding position, this was considered a significant risk until formally confirmed, with a value of circa £4million.

The Committee were informed that there was no additional funding being provided to meet the inherent budget shortfall going forward as a result of either the uplift in Teachers pay (set by Welsh Government), nor the 2023 NJC pay award (set by national pay bargaining) and was the most challenging settlement since devolution.

The Committee were advised that the final settlement was expected to be published by Welsh Government on the 27th February, 2024 alongside the Welsh Government budget, the day before full council meets to agree the final budget.

The Committee thereupon considered the following detailed budget information appended to the Strategy, relevant to Corporate and Performance Scrutiny:-

- Appendix A** – Corporate Budget Strategy 2024/25 to 2026/27
- Appendix A(i)** – Efficiency summary for the Chief Executive and Corporate Services departments
- Appendix A(ii)** – Growth Pressures summary for the Chief Executive and Corporate Services departments
- Appendix B** – Budget monitoring report for the Chief Executive and Corporate Services departments
- Appendix C** – Charging Digest for the Chief Executive and Corporate Services departments

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

- In response to a query as to why the alternative scenario was chosen by the Authority for the Medium Term Financial Plan, the Director of Resources confirmed that this was the most realistic option out of the two options offered, due to the uncertainty of elections for both the UK Government and Welsh Government combined with a new Welsh First Minister.
- In response to a query, the Committee were advised that the Authority has been pro-active in informing property owners of the increase in premiums to both second and empty homes. This increase was approved by Cabinet in December, 2023 with a review of the policy taking place during 2024. Cabinet will consider further potential increases in premiums. The income received will be built into next year's budget, with a report to Cabinet for consideration of the tax base during the autumn term.
- The Committee were advised that the loan to the Scarlets had matured and a meeting between parties has been arranged during February to work to an acceptable outcome.
- In response to a query, members were advised that the education budget forecasts were monitored throughout the year and due to new expenditure pressures, an indicative sum of £15.4million has been allocated across departments, as identified in appendix B of the report. The Committee were informed that the most significant area of pressures was within Children's services.

- The Committee were advised that a 4% increase for staff salaries was a realistic assumption, given that the rate of inflation was decreasing.
- It was noted by the Committee, that due to lack of information provided from schools regarding individual reserves, future forecasts could not be assumed.
- The Committee were informed that Marketing and Media officers were looking into providing budget consultation feedback to the public.
- In response to a query regarding an increase to Delta Wellbeing fees, officers confirmed that the SLA is now serving more organisations and other authorities including Carmarthenshire. There has been an increase of staff, rising from 40 to 100 and changes to technology.

UNANAMOUSLY RESOLVED that:

4.1 the Revenue Budget Strategy Consultation 2024/25 to 2026/27 be received

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

SCHOOL'S BUDGET FORUM

23 JANUARY 2024

RH provided a presentation to School Budget Forum members discussing the schools position in an attempt to understand the corporate position.

Provisional settlement from WG – It was expected there would be an average increase of 3.1%, however, CCC received an increase of 3.3% on the 2023-24 settlement. This has resulted in £11m of additional funding from budget reductions (where schools are a part). Following actions such as £2m vacancy factor (not in schools) being implemented there will be a total shortfall for 24/25 of £0.8m. RH raised concerns that there is currently a draft budget which is not balanced, this is an unusual situation meaning we must find more savings.

Specific grant – RH presented a slide demonstrating the value of current grants, however as other costs have increased schools will be at a disadvantage, 20% reduction in real terms. GJ stated this is an additional cut to the budget with further implications on what we have to offer pupils.

Current Validation Assumptions – Inflation is expected to be 4% next year which will impact schools from SLAs perspective.

Teachers Pay – The pay award is estimated at 4%. WG have assumed the level of teacher pay awards for September 2024 but not shared final information resulting in CCC estimating 4% based on other LAs. WG states LAs must allow for teachers pay in budgets. GM informed a motion will be raised at County Council tomorrow challenging WG on this year/last year's settlements where we are £3m short after honouring teachers' pay awards. RH stated he presented this at an ERF meeting, where unions agreed that WG needed to honour this funding gap.

PE questioned if officers are confident LAs will be able to meet the demand of unavoidable pressures? GM stated we've been in a good position for many years with managing learners and are developing local children's homes to support those in need, but this will take time. There is capital funding to support work being carried out but no revenue funding. PE stated he is cautious as there is a higher level of need with pupils while schools are facing cuts. RH added some of the money received is going to existing provisions for families with disabled children, foster care and growing the social worker capacity.

Pay assumptions - 5% was assumed for September 2023 which was not enough, and the LA needs to find the shortfall to correct for next year's budget resulting in the £3m shortfall next year with the value to be found before this year.

Energy - 1/3 of the energy needed for the financial year 25/26 has been purchased and costs are continuing to come down, helping to bridge part of the budget gap.

Teachers' pensions - There has been an increase of 5% next year which was referenced in the Ministers letter. This is expected to be fully funded.

GJ referenced the slide stating "Current year £8.8million draw on reserves is unsustainable" asking if it was after the suggested savings mentioned previously. SN confirmed it was not and is based on the October returns. GM added if the proposal to reduce schools budget goes through, we may see an additional 20 schools go into deficit.

Vacancy Factor - A proposed £2m will be applied to Council services, excluding schools. RH stated each department is responsible the vacancy factor to deliver an additional in year saving relative to staffing budget. This is done either through natural staff turnover or through deliberately holding vacancies unfilled. GM stated there is a £343,000 additional reduction in the budget on top other savings within the department.

RH stated all figures mentioned have related to year one and there are no public figures for year 2 and year 3 to date. Following work carried out by Cardiff University forecasts for 2025/26 and 2026/27 were presented, providing modelled figures but these are the best we have at present to inform future considerations as the scale of issue not going away.

Scale of cuts in future years were highlighted noting the department have a large shortfall for years 2 and 3, and the scale of uncertainty on pay awards was highlighted and a balanced budget at present cannot be presented.

Key risks – It is unclear what the pay awards will be for 2024, use of reserves in schools which has been significant this year and won't be possible for many next year, Children's Services pressures, pensions and the 800k shortfall position.

The consultation period is still open with approx. 3,000 responses to date. RH will be attending the Education Employee Relations Forum next week and a final budget will be in front of Carmarthenshire Council on 28th February 2024.

PE informed of an article in Wales Online, discussing Council debts. Members were informed by GM and SN that the article focuses on borrowing, ignoring the different forms of funding within LAs. RH provided context on Carmarthenshire borrowing position stating, as of March 2023 there is \$411m of outstanding borrowing ranging from £20m borrowed last year at low rates through to loans taken out in 1970s.

Members thanked shared with RH for presenting the budget information clearly.

PJ raised concerns about costs and additional vulnerability with a need to find more internal solutions as opposed to "going to market" as this is the more cost efficient. TS informed discussions have started in CASH about making efficiencies around sharing staff knowledge and services.

GM gave a presentation on departmental budgets stating we are fully funding teachers' pay for next year and growth funding bids were made on behalf of schools, but these were not successful. Members were reminded the department (including schools) needs to find almost £4.8m in savings. Policy proposals are being consulted on and managerial proposals can be handled internally. All will have an impact on children and education.

GM continued explaining £3.454m equates to an estimated £120 per pupil reduction although this may be higher. Youth support and music services are not statutory services, but it may be argued they have benefits to pupils. These services are co funded (council funding and grant funded).

Proposed policy cuts came to £335k leaving over £1m on managerial savings to be made. This includes a review of the middle tier, moving from multiple grants to one grant with four pillars. SN clarified grants moving forward will include equity, welsh language, reform as school standards. WG have stated the funding pot is the same and there will be a national formula with terms and conditions being developed with the aim for less bureaucracy and grants. If there are no regional grants, the money comes direct to LA putting pressure on our teams. GM informed the Early Years Education component is covered by a grant which has allowed this funding to cover gaps and overspends in previous years.

Relating to savings within catering, work is to be carried out around secondary schools catering costs and offer. PE stated changes to the breakfast provision has been raised before and it cannot be managed by HTs when there isn't the capacity and staffing. SD explained how this proposal has multiple options including charges to parents and catering providing the food with schools providing the care. PE raised concerns that schools are taking more work on with less support. SD informed pupils are entitled to the free breakfast and many parents have become reliant on the service that. GJ understands this is a core offer, but schools can't be all things to all people, requesting further guidance from LAs on what they should offer. GJ raised the section 52 document previously reviewed drawing attention to items he feels are not fit for purpose such as ALN funding and how it is shared with schools. He would like to see more of understanding how we have arrived at the figures presented within section 52 requesting an information map breakdown.

ACTION: Explain rationalisation map of supplements to next meeting.

TOWN AND COMMUNITY COUNCIL LIAISON FORUM

17 JANUARY 2024

14 local Councils were present, with some duplicate attendees.

Chris Moore, Director of Corporate Services gave a presentation outlining Carmarthenshire County Council's draft budget for 2024/25 and challenges over the medium term

- Questions were raised in terms of the Vacant Posts factor and any plans the Council may have in place in terms of Early Voluntary Retirement.
- Councils also discussed the Asset Transfer opportunities (e.g. Public Conveniences) but stressed that budgetary pressures also apply to them locally.
- Councils also noted that the timescales for consultation were difficult for them, due to the meetings scheduled (although Chris noted that we could be flexible for a few days after consultation closure if there were specific comments)
- A question was raised in terms of how challenging CCC were in terms of the budget uplift from Mid & West Wales Fire & Rescue Service were.
- Members were interested in the work of the Transformation Team / use of external consultants and steps we are taking as a Council to work more efficiently / save internal costs such as paper etc

8) APPENDIX 1 – MAP OF COMMUNITY AREAS

