

A1 Extract of draft minutes of Children & Young People Select Committee – 19th Jan 2021

Budget Scrutiny: Scrutiny of the budget proposals for 2021/22.

Peter Davies, Nicola Wellington and Tyrone Stokes delivered the presentation and report, and answered the members' questions, along with Julie Boothroyd and Cabinet Member Phil Murphy.

Challenge:

Monlife must have lost a lot of revenue from schools using leisure centres, as well as gyms being closed. Are we happy that Monlife will be able to ride the storm?

Timing couldn't have been any worse for Monlife, in terms of what has happened this year. The income losses suffered by Monlife have been met in full by Welsh Government through the Covid Hardship Fund – to their credit, they have followed through with funding dealing with income shortfalls resulting from the pandemic. We expect this to continue into next year until services are back up and running. Monlife is confident of footfall returning when things can reopen fully. While we have furloughed a number of Monlife staff, we have drawn on that capacity release to support Test, Trace and Protect, and assisted with Business Grants administration, and it will assist in supporting some of the pandemic rollout, working with health.

As our levels of looked-after children have increased, is there any scope for additional grants from Welsh Government, particularly if the increase is greater than in other local authorities?

There have been some small amounts of funding that have helped on the periphery, but nothing specifically for looked-after children. Over a year ago, a Welsh Government task force assessed our strategy around the reduction in looked-after children, and we have to report on a quarterly basis as to how we are progressing. So it is being observed very closely from a Welsh Government perspective. Our numbers plateaued this year, which we hope will continue. Small amounts of grant money that have come through have been helpful in bolstering intervention and prevention provision, to prevent escalation further up into more costly services. We hope to be able, through the evidence gathered from that, to secure other monies.

Are the 3 remaining pupils at Mounton House still based there, and is that under the PRU? What is the plan for them?

The 3 pupils referred to are the Monmouthshire pupils who were in Mounton House when it closed. Two have now moved into independent provision, one has moved over to PRS. The cost for all 3 has been built in and will be included in the tracker mentioned earlier as we move forward.

Is the PRS based in Mounton House? Are there other pupils for PRS based there?

Mounton House remains vacant. There would be a business case to back that provision if we did decide to move in that way, but it wouldn't be one pupil, it would be the PRS service. We are looking at that option but there are cost implications to work through.

There is a concern about the collection of council tax following the economic effects of Covid, and the demographic changes. Has that been properly evaluated and factored into the calculations?

The tax yield is predicated on us determining a council tax base for the council. One of the drivers behind that is a forecast and assessment of the number of chargeable dwellings and new properties being built. The second key consideration is the council tax collection rate. We have in fact retained an underlying assumption of a 99% collection rate because our data shows strength and a positive rebound on collection. If we compare to other authorities in Wales, overall we have a much stronger recovery position. We are comfortable in holding it at 99%. The challenges our communities are facing are at the heart of the work done by Richard Jones (Policy and Governance) and his team, looking at the overall Wellbeing and Future Generations Equality Impact assessment – council tax is a key feature of that. It also looks at the impact of the array of budget proposals and where that ends up on those with lower incomes. Council Tax reduction schemes and discounts available to families are important. It is a very difficult balance for the council to strike, given its finances. Cabinet is proposing a 4.9% increase but safeguards and mitigations are in place around the discounts on offer.

Regarding the list of potential risks, are we confident evaluating the investments that we aren't affecting our ability to borrow in the future?

Yes, the slide on risks and considerations wasn't exhaustive. One bullet point talks about the pressures that we aren't currently aware of – this is the strategic risk register, highlighting where we have risks that could materialise. The budget is predicated on a set of assumptions. If, for example, an officer were to ask for extra money in a budget proposal for extra pressures but wasn't able to provide evidence that those pressures were forthcoming, it wouldn't work its way in. The reasonable assumption that has been introduced is based on the looked-after children pressure that we have to accommodate, and the fact that it is stabilised. We look at each case in isolation and comfort ourselves on the underlying assumptions. We don't want to base things on risks that are more probable than likely, because if they are probable then prudence would dictate that they be incorporated in some way in the budget.

Looking at the existing risks, and our potential inability to borrow, is there potential risk on funding across the board?

We are governed by the Prudential Code, which determines that our borrowing is affordable, sustainable and prudent. Indicators set thresholds within which we work. We have sufficient headroom in our borrowing capabilities. Ultimately, the ability to determine whether our borrowing is sustainable, prudent and affordable will be couched within our ability to fund it within the revenue budget i.e. the borrowing costs in terms of interest and repayment, which is called MRP. We don't have any concerns in that regard at this point. For further information, the treasury strategy is going to Audit Committee and then Council on 11th March, and will draw those conclusions.

Chair's Summary:

Questions were asked about Monlife and sustainability, issues of grants for looked-after children, and matters relating to Council tax collection, as well as broader questions deemed to be outside the scope of this committee. For information: there will be a virtual consultation over the next 4 weeks. The website's budget page will contain an overview, a link to the core budget consultation presentation, budget papers, a blog from Cabinet Member Phil Murphy, and a feedback form. Answers to general questions related to the budget can be found in the Cabinet papers.

A2 Extract of draft minutes of Economy & Development Select Committee – 21st Jan 2021

Budget Scrutiny: Scrutiny of the budget proposals for 2021/22.

Jonathan Davies and Dave Loder delivered the presentation and answered the members' questions, with Frances O'Brien.

Challenge:

Given the previous discussion about pay freezes and service delivery, and pressures next year, is it realistic to say that we are going to continue delivering our full suite of services?

That's a valid question because we are going to have to consider if some of the services will be sustainable long-term, or whether they can be delivered in a different way. We will need to continue reviewing them over the medium-term financial plan and strategy. We've been very fortunate not to have to significantly close or change any services, but we have to continually monitor the situation and prioritise, in terms of what non-statutory services are there that we would look to adapt and change. Those are very difficult considerations to make.

One of the cost pressures not budgeted for is MonLife investment considerations. Can we have more detail on this?

We don't have detailed information for this meeting. The team is considering whether to postpone some of those investments for the immediate future while we understand what the Covid recovery situation is. The presentation slide was in relation to the capital commitments going forward, and those pressures and investments sitting outside the current budget. There's a list of potential MonLife investments that they would seek to make over the medium term, which is available in the pack of papers that went to Cabinet and is linked on today's agenda.

The Welsh Government settlement has been more generous than ever this year. What are the reasons for this? Are there lessons to learn from other councils?

The settlement itself is made up of quite a complicated calculation around many factors, of which some have higher impacts than others. A couple of the indicators where we've benefitted this time are concerning population and 'equalisation of resources': this looks at the ability of authorities to raise their funding from council tax, and applies a ratio to adjust for that across Welsh authorities. It is very difficult to explain. Welsh Government are working now to make that indicator a lot clearer for authorities. It's been a big factor this time; the reasons for that are probably statistical, and we don't understand the full picture of that yet.

Does our input affect the amount that we get?

The inputs are set at a statutory level so the returns we make, in terms of those statistical returns to Welsh Government, go towards producing that data for them to put into their model. We don't have the ability to change those but there are varying amounts of what goes in: pupil numbers, population estimates, benefits data, and the demands on our services and populations that we give information back on. We therefore have very limited scope to change or influence those factors – it is very much reliant on those statutory indicators that we have to report back.

What have the discussions been around medium-term plan and deficit recovery? What are our expectations?

It's a very difficult picture to play through in relation to the medium term. We're continuing to focus on the areas that we can control, and look to influence Welsh Government to give more clarity on the position going forward. When we have a one-year settlement there is very limited scope to plan past the end of 2021-22. We will always aim to maintain and sustain services – we don't want services to fall away. Many of them are going to transform and develop as we recover from the pandemic e.g. how town centres look, how residents travel, working from home, etc. Various working groups have been established to look at these things. The key point is to put pressure at a political level back on Welsh Government to provide clarity over how our funding will come through in the longer-term settlement.

Has our Section 151 Officer (Peter Davies) raised any concerns about the drawdown of reserves?

Our officer has had to consider that as we develop these proposals. A lot of the reserves and council fund balances are limited. We have benefitted from the 2019-20 outturn position – we were able to bolster the council fund by £1.8m. This gave us some flexibility to deal with the Covid and non-Covid pressures coming in the current financial year. It's important to note that even though that was increased by £1.8m it still brought us to a middling level on the council fund reserve, compared to across the Welsh authorities. We're proposing to use £750k from that council fund, which is very much a one-off use. When we say it's not sustainable to maintain that, if we use it and we don't then top up that reserve at year-end, it's a continual cycle in the reduction in those balances, and gives us limited opportunities to support the budget when our only other viable options of funding those priorities are council tax and Welsh Government settlement. Per head, we are still right at the bottom of that funding.

Chair's Summary:

We have covered the impact on income, which has had a significant income on budget planning. The various levels of uncertainty in relation to central government is a challenge for us to map out what the next few years will look like, financially. There are no particular recommendations but we can give overall feedback, as a committee. Cabinet Member Phil Murphy will pick up the points and questions raised by members today.

A3 Extract of draft minutes of Adults Select committee – 26th January 2021

Budget Scrutiny: Scrutiny of the budget proposals for 2021/22

Jonathan Davies and Tyrone Stokes delivered the presentation and answered the members' questions with Ian Saunders and Peter Davies.

This committee previously had a report that said the Disabled Facility Grant will be reduced to £600k from £900k?

The support for the £900k capital budget for DFGs has been in the proposals for a number of years now. So continuation at that level, above £600k, has been reported for a while, with £900k as the base budget. We aren't sure which report is referred to but we can check that.

The Disabled Facility Grant includes Safety At Home, the amount for which is going up – is the £900k for DFG definite, and how much of it is the DFGs, rather than Safety At Home?

We try to be as flexible with that on a year-by-year basis as we can. We work closely with Social Care around that split because we know how important safety at home is. Around £100k of that budget goes to safety at home but we will be flexible, and will take our steer from OTEs and Care And Repair in relation to the levels of expenditure. In addition to our budget we also have Enable, which is a Welsh Government grant that helps us to build in some flexibility around adaptation.

Covid is splitting society – is the council acknowledging the number of people going through resultant difficulties, and what effect will this have on the budget's distribution?

As we exit the pandemic, we don't know what's around the corner or what the new level will be. In terms of addressing the pandemic, the Welsh Government Covid Hardship Fund has allowed us to address the pressures in the Care sector as well – this is support across the board, covering younger adults (including those with physical and mental disabilities) and older adults (to help to stabilise the marketplace and address those needs as we go through the pandemic.) There was significant investment in this year's budget for physically and learning disabled adults: £1.044m. We have tried to address all of the population's needs, not leaving anyone behind, and are committed to continuing that.

The figures from Stats Wales don't agree with Monmouthshire's – can this be addressed?

The reason is that our budget, which we label as 'DFGs', should probably be 'Disabled Adaptations', so it has proved to be a bit misleading.

Regarding the increase in fees for residential and non-residential care: what effect would the £100 cap have on the residential side? How does the cap operate?

In terms of charging, we follow the Social Services and Wellbeing Act that was introduced in 2014 by Welsh Government. For non-residential services it covers care in the home or community (day centres and respite), and the amount that we can charge anybody is capped at £100 per week. To arrive at that, they go through a means-tested assessment. If they are assessed that they can pay up to the maximum of £100, we will charge them whichever is lower: the £100 or the cost of the service. So if someone were only getting 2 hours per week, we would only charge them the hourly rate (£14.64) x 2. If someone were getting 20 hours a week, 20 x £14.64 would be much more than £100, in which case we would charge them the £100.

There is no cap for residential services. It is based not only on the person's income but also on their assets and dwelling i.e. their main property would be brought into consideration. If it is deemed that they have enough income and capital to pay for themselves, then they might not qualify for local authority financial support.

Does the £100 cap apply if, for example, someone is coming in in the morning and again in the evening to help an elderly person who doesn't need a care home?

When we charge, there is no distinction between whether the service was provided by the local authority or external market. If someone were to get 1 hour per week from the local authority and 1 hour private, the charge would be roughly £30 per week. If someone is assessed and they can pay the maximum amount, it is capped at £100 so we would charge them £30. If they were to get 20 hours a week – 5 from the local authority and 5 from the private sector – it would be approximately £150 total,

and therefore the charge would be £100. No one will pay any more than £100 if they've come through the local authority and they've been financially assessed, in terms of non-residential. That includes care in their own home or day centre provision – it's all capped at £100. We have an hourly rate for care in the home and a session charge for day centre attendance.

So non-residential is not based on income or capital?

It is, because if someone has gone through a means-tested assessment they will only be charged what they can afford. If they can afford to pay more than the £100, it will be capped at £100. It still includes income and capital but not their main dwelling, as they live in the community and still need a home. But if they then go into residential or nursing care, the main dwelling is then taken into consideration; that's one of the differences between residential and non-residential, and why the charge can be more, or they might not qualify for local authority assistance, because with residential more can be taken into consideration than with means-tested assessment.

Is that different from England?

Yes, the Welsh Care Act is different from the English one. Therefore, if someone moves from England to Wales there can be some confusion that we need to clear up with them. Also, if clients engage in services with solicitors from England, or places like Age Concern, we have to point out to them that the Act is different in Wales.

There is an assumption of a 1% increase of pay costs for staff – what about care staff? What would be the wider impact if companies also provided more than 1% for their staff?

The pay award is governed by the announcement from the UK Chancellor. We have been prudent in assigning a 1% pay award. The external carers are explained in the slideshow presentation, concerning the pressures that we have in Adult Social Care next year: we have a £536k pressure for provider fees, which is to incorporate any pay increases that private providers might give their staff. We have a fair fee negotiation tool that we use with the care providers; with this, we look at all issues such as pay award. One of the indicators we look at is the increase in the National Living Wage. That's already been announced by the UK Chancellor, and we have incorporated it in our modelling.

Will we still be able to get staff from overseas following Brexit? Will UK staff be willing to fill the vacancies?

This will be a national concern and we don't know how things will pan out. We've tried to address as much as possible to alleviate the impact on the front line services. With the providers, we have tried to meet the wage increase.

Is it wise to include the £536k – will the care providers therefore raise their pay further?

One of our mission statements as an authority is to be transparent. It is right to put forward our budget and try to address those issues. We have the fair fee consultation negotiation, so discussion with providers about fees is already underway, so that we can continue to work in partnership. But we do have limited financial resources with which to work, something that the Care sector appreciates. The fair fee negotiation tool has served us very well for the last 10+ years.

What discussions have taken place to try to understand how the Hardship Fund will evolve?

Our approach has been to focus on things that we can control i.e. those elements of the budget that we know. We also have the risk register looking at potential Covid risks and how they may or may not be funded as we move into the next financial year. We need to consider a number of things. Most important is to have the engagement with Welsh Government about how the Fund might continue, perhaps developing into more specific grants coming through, moving away from a claims basis towards allocation. We're continuing to lobby at a political level, with the Leader making strong representations. But at a local level, we're looking at the potential impacts from the pandemic on service deliveries, and how the demands on services might change as we come out of it. There are many different things to consider over the long term.

Regarding void payments, have we seen any unintended consequences with providers not accepting placements because the voids are covered?

We are making void payments on behalf of Welsh Government through the Hardship Fund. It is understandable that care homes are cautious about accepting new clients, but they aren't resistant, and are working with us. We talk to the care sector in a weekly forum about various issues and how we can support them with any problems they encounter. It is a joint approach.

With people needing rehabilitation and reablement due to Covid, do we have a pipeline figure in terms of pressure and new care packages for next year?

We have a short-term intervention reablement policy and a reablement team. We are over-recruiting our own in-house home carers to accommodate the demand, and Health has come up with winter pressures money to alleviate that impact. There is also a £250k extra investment for the shortfall in commissioned care in the Usk area. We are looking to accommodate that specific additional capacity in next year's budget.

As Covid is a health issue, surely the process of rehabilitation and reablement shouldn't be a pressure that falls solely to local authorities? What about the Health Board and its funding?

Our 3 community care teams are integrated with Health, so we have their practitioners as well around OTs. We have a joint integrated services partnership board that meets as well. The assessment process will identify what is a social care task and responsibility from the local authority and what is a Health one. It is split out at that stage, ensuring that everyone is meeting their obligations.

Coming out of the pandemic, Welsh Government should have Social Care very high on its agenda. All local authorities in Wales will lobby them very hard for fair funding within the care sector. We hope that there is proper recognition and funding as we move into that period, as the sector will continue to be a budgetary pressure point. So it's not just a case of local authorities and health boards – Welsh Government plays a key role in its acknowledgement of where funding is distributed.

Regarding the provider fees, could the £536k figure potentially increase?

We have modelled this figure in terms of our fair fee negotiations. Part 9 of the Act covers to the pooling of residential budgets, and another covers a regional fee-setting process: there is a Gwent working group that has discussed this, but it is a long way off from being agreed, as is pricing up the implications if Monmouthshire were to adopt it. If we were to get to that juncture, before adopting anything it would be presented to members for scrutiny and agreement.

What is an example of the flexible use of capital receipts to fund service reform?

The flexible use of capital receipts is under a Capitalisation directive from Welsh Government. We've used it in the 2019/20 financial year and have budgeted it for this year too. We are permitted to use our capital receipts to fund eligible revenue expenditure that looks to fund service reform. We propose using another £1m of capital receipts as part of this draft budget. The key risk around that is that our capital receipts pot is limited. Traditionally, we have used that to support our ongoing capital pressures. We have to be mindful of the limited nature of the reserves to support the capital programme. As part of these budget proposals, we recognise that this is an exceptional year and a one-off use of reserves, as far as possible.

So to use capita monies on revenue certain criteria have to be met?

Yes, there are strict criteria for usage of capital receipts, around service transformation, partnership working, sharing with regional authorities and organisations, etc.

Were non-residential care savings based on a slight increase in the hourly rate, and what was the increase? How are the residential care savings arrived at?

Non-residential savings were £11k and residential were £68k. The savings are related to the fees and charges, as discussed earlier, based on the increase announced by the department of Work and Pensions to the state retirement and benefits of 2.5%. We've taken our income budgets and uplifted them 2.5%. That's the extra income that we've put forward as a saving and that we might be able to get from the charging. The residential saving doesn't only relate to our care home (Severn View), it's people in residential care, generally. They could be in a private care home and their placement is funded by the local authority, and their means-tested assessment says that they can't pay the full charge themselves but they have to pay a contribution to the local authority, regardless of whether they reside in our single care home or in a private care home.

Looking forward, is there any expectation to redesign services?

We've taken a conscious decision with next year's budget (21/22) not to bring any savings from redesigning frontline services. It is possible that services will be provided in a different way as we come out of Covid – but we simply don't know at this stage. If and when it is felt that a service needs to be redesigned, we will pick that budget year and bring it the members' attention.

Homelessness is another huge pressure – £874k. Can we hear about the policy update from Welsh Government, and what their expectation will be for the next financial year?

The position is consistent with previous discussions. Welsh Government is continuing with their change in policy concerning eliminating rough sleeping. They want to improve the provision of temporary and permanent accommodation – quality, type, etc. No one would disagree with the sentiment of the policy but it creates a challenge for us. Our demands continue to be high; at the last count, we had over 120 people in temporary accommodation, most of whom are high need and have challenging, complex cases. The situation over the last 6 months has been more challenging because of funding but it has significantly improved, and continues to. Welsh Government's main thrust has been to uplift the Housing Support grant programme. We have just under £700k extra in that programme and are looking to continue Phase 2 projects that were granted this financial year. We have also had government assurance about the Hardship Fund in this area, and we hope that Cabinet will agree to some

additional staffing, taking us to a more proactive position. We continue to work with the housing associations over additional accommodation.

Aside from Health and Care, what is the position of the budget in relation to the other portfolios?

In terms of the overall directorate, we have pressures just under £3m. £1.26m relates to this Adult Select portfolio, the remaining pressures relate to Children's Services and trying to address the overspend and the pressures that were delivered in the paper to CYP Select last week. Public Protection had Covid-related pressures from lost registrar's income, which Welsh Government has now decided to compensate us for, allowing that team to come within its budget. TTP is Gwent-wide, for which there are various boards, managed by Health. We are recovering all of the monies in line with the costs Monmouthshire put forward for TTP.

Chair's Summary:

The committee thanks officers and frontline staff for their hard work. Councillor Pavia is concerned that rehab and reablement doesn't fall disproportionately to local government but that Health takes its fair share of responsibility, especially as Post-Covid syndrome is a complete unknown. Officers agreed and will keep this in mind. As there are a lot of crosscutting aspects in the budgets, officers were asked to put page numbers on the reports. Peter Davies noted that information needs to be distilled and simplified for the public – this is the purpose of the presentation – but that there is further information on the website for any member of the public wishing to seek further details.

A4 Extract of draft minutes of Strong Communities Select Committee – 28th January 2021

Budget Scrutiny: Scrutiny of the budget proposals for 2021/22.

Jonathan Davies and Dave Loder delivered the presentation and answered the members' questions, with additional comments from Cabinet Member Phil Murphy.

Challenge:

When comparing Welsh Government funding for Blaenau Gwent and Monmouthshire, should more context not to be given i.e. that the former has much more deprivation?

We are conscious that our demographics in Monmouthshire are quite different from some of the other authorities but the funding formula itself is supposed to deal with all of those. We are aware that that formula doesn't benefit us in many ways, and we are looking to have a dialogue with Welsh Government over its reform. Regarding the proposed settlement for next year, the areas where we have benefitted, comparatively, are from population numbers, pupil numbers and equalisation of resource – Welsh Government has gone some way to recognising that Monmouthshire has the largest proportion of funding from council tax, which isn't sustainable for residents over the long term. Comparison between Blaenau Gwent and Monmouthshire is very useful for the public, so is included here principally for the public consultation.

What was Welsh Government offsetting through its grants? Homelessness, for example?

We are awaiting specific grant settlement figures. The pressure recognises that we haven't had the confirmation from Welsh Government yet, so the pressure you see in the papers is the gross pressure and doesn't recognise the further support that we expect to receive on homelessness and the housing grant. The current homelessness pressure is £875k. We've had information regarding additional grants for the next financial year; one is an increase in the housing support grant of £667k. We can't apportion a lot of that homelessness cost to that additional funding – that's being used up elsewhere – but Welsh Government has released another £4m across Wales to help deal with the homelessness issue. Housing officers think that we can move about £275k of that £875k against this funding. So Welsh Government has agreed to fund the first 6 months our homelessness costs via the Hardship Fund. Therefore, the £875k has come down to £600k.

We're increasing fees and charges in line with inflation – could we have the precise figures? Are we going for an average? What's the bigger picture?

There is a detailed breakdown of the fees and charges in Appendix 2 of the budget papers. There isn't an overall increase; the increases are specific to services. The average increase is 2.5%, which is a little over current inflation. Officers set their price increases based on what they think the market will afford. They take into consideration the effect on the public etc.

To clarify: we will increase council tax by 4.95%, and, as an average, increase charges that the market can handle, at 2.5% – 'the market' presumably being our residents. Is that accurate?

Yes, on average, for the services in this portfolio, there is a 2.5% increase. In the detailed appendix listing the fees and charges, there is a percentage against each one. Not all services have been increased. Across this portfolio, we're expecting to only pull in £10k more of income.

There has been a significant increase in free school meals. What are our contingencies for feeding families in the holidays, especially in the summer?

In our settlement from Welsh Government, there is an amount for FSMs. The further commitment to support those meals during the holidays comes from a Welsh Government policy commitment specifically – we get funding for that through the Hardship Fund. We continue to make those payments and to meet that policy commitment. Moving into next year, we will continue with our existing provision for FSMs. We are seeing an increase in numbers, which has been reflected as we've moved through this financial year. We certainly need to accommodate that pressure as we proceed.

Environmental health staff are doing extra work and have been redeployed. Where's our backfill and where's the money coming from for that?

Waste relates to the environmental health team, falling within our public protection, alongside trading standards etc. But yes, a lot of staff have been redeployed to Track And Trace. Those costs will be reclaimable through Track And Trace funding, via the Health Board.

Extra I.T. provision is needed in schools. Where's the money coming from to help them?

We will have to defer this question to the Education Finance Officer, and respond later.

There is a deficit in CYP concerning looked-after children and safeguarding but not enough money seems to be put in. Is there any extra provision to help families with looked-after children?

Yes, this was discussed at CYP Select last week. It's important to note that there is provision in the draft budget for an additional £1.46m for support for looked-after children costs, which goes some way towards meeting those commitments. The service works very closely with Health in ensuring that there is early intervention, where possible. Also, we aren't making staff efficiencies and applying a vacancy factor to that service in 2021-22, so we recognise that there is additional pressure in that area.

It's very positive that some hotels have opened up for homelessness and domestic abuse pressures. Homelessness is not in our portfolio but what money is being put towards that?

We are putting provision into next year's budget to cover as much of the homelessness budget as we can. We hope to receive further funding to offset that pressure. Questions concerning the suitability of rooms should probably be directed to the Housing Officer.

There has been a lot of flytipping and recycling workers have been moved elsewhere: where is that in this budget, and is there further provision for them not moving back anytime soon?

With recycling centres closed, there has probably been an increase in flytipping, and our teams will be doing their utmost to keep on top of it. It will probably cost us more money to get rid of it, and is an unfortunate consequence of the centres being closed. We recognise that Covid is having a very large impact on services not just monetarily, but in terms of resources too.

An uptake of free schools meals entitles a school to additional funding. Where does that additional funding come from?

The settlement for any financial year from Welsh Government will include an amount based on the data that we submit.

How will schools attendance affect the contract hand-back with taxis etc.?

It is a problem. Sometimes there are contract hand-backs because the operator goes out of business or they feel that they can't run the service on the contract that we have given to them. The Passenger Transport Team does a very good job in managing that, dealing with sudden dropouts from operators at short notice. Going forward, there is a potential risk that we won't be able to put on a service but so far, the Passenger Transport Service has managed any problem that it has encountered.

There is a £65k saving on sweepers: is there a part-funding arrangement for these? If so, how will this affect us?

The part-funding offer sent to community councils wasn't taken up much. £65k is the cost of the machine that is operating. It won't affect the service, as far as we are aware.

Caldicot Town Council has an arrangement with town centre sweeping that includes the use of a sweeper. Could that be considered?

It's probably best to refer that directly to the Commercial and Operations Manager for an answer.

How many outstanding loans do we have with Welsh Government for street lighting?

There are currently 4 outstanding loans. Each has a different payment period, as some were taken out earlier than others.

What is the status of council tax collection this year? Have we put in place contingencies – do we expect to collect as much next year?

Early indications, when the pandemic first broke, were that there would be problems in terms of collection. As the year has progressed, we are returning to our usual levels. We don't foresee an overall issue. The total council tax collection usually takes a long time to manifest – we probably won't know the final position on that for quite some time. But it's important to note that Welsh Government is supporting local authorities with some specific funding that will come in February. We don't know yet how much that will be. We should get an allocation to support us with any shortfalls that we will face. As we move into next year, the signs are that our collection rates won't deteriorate and we shouldn't be affected in totality.

Is a 4.95% council tax increase sufficient?

We are proposing to support the budget this year with reserve usage and looking to limit the impact on council taxpayers as much as possible. As we move towards the final budget our commitment to that reserve usage will remain. The point of putting last year's surplus into reserves was for it to be used in circumstances such as these. No one likes to see council tax go up – 4.95 is about the absolute maximum that we could countenance under present circumstances. It will cause difficulties for some, which is why there are reliefs. It is better to use reserves rather than hit the public with more than we need to.

Chair's Summary:

Councillor Batrouni asked why we are comparing Blaenau Gwent and Monmouthshire given the disparity in deprivation between them. Officers confirmed that they are conscious that our demographic is different from other local authorities but the funding formula doesn't recognise the difference. The largest proportion of funding from council tax and Welsh Government recognises this. We compare ourselves to other authorities because it helps the public to understand the difference between what we and other authorities get. The councillor also asked about Welsh Government offsetting through its grants for homelessness – officers confirmed that we are awaiting grant settlement figures but that will come under the Adults Select committee. A breakdown of fees and charges in line with inflation was requested – officers confirmed that a detailed breakdown is available in Appendix 2 of the budget. Clarity was sought as to whether we're increasing council tax and charges by 2.5%. Officers confirmed that not all services are being increased, but on average, there is a 2.5% increase.

Councillor Guppy asked questions about free school meals. Officers confirmed that there is an increase in the number of applicants for FSMs and we will get a settlement from Welsh Government for that. The councillor also asked where the money is coming from for waste pressures, with environmental health being redeployed to Track And Trace: these costs will be reclaimed through Track And Trace. With regard to looked-after children, there is a provision of £1.46m. Hotel costs, homelessness and domestic abuse: it has been put provisionally into next year's budget to receive further funding from Welsh Government.

Councillor Eason asked about contract hand-backs, which the officers confirmed can be problematic, and there has been a risk to services, but so far, Transport has not failed to support the services. Officers asked that the Councillor direct his question regarding the sweeper to Nigel Leaworthy.

Councillor Guppy also asked if we expect to see as much council tax coming in next year. Officers advised that there were indications of issues collecting council tax at the start of last year, however things seem to be more consistent now, and there are allocations from Welsh Government. Councillor Guppy also requested that we make communications to residents about council tax relief very clear.

A5 Draft minutes of Schools Budget Forum – 21st January 2021

Presentation from Cllr P. Murphy on the 2021-22 budget proposals for Monmouthshire County Council.

Cllr P. Murphy introduced the budget presentation, members understood that over the last 4 years the council had managed to save £22m to enable the budgets to be balanced. There is still an on-going pressure due to demographics and demand led pressures, for 21-22 this is a pressure of £10.1m.

The settlement has been above average for the coming financial year, but Monmouthshire remains the worst funded council in Wales. The increase is 3.9%, the Wales average is 3.8%, funding per head or population is £1,067 with the Wales average being £1,471.

Despite this services have been challenged to sustain themselves rather than see a service close. This may result in services redesigning how they work or scaling back rather than close.

Members understood that council tax is proposed to increase by 4.95% which is an increase of £1.31 per week for a band D property. This would see the Monmouthshire average increase to £1,380.76 compared with the Wales average of £1,354.02.

The proposals for the 2021-22 budget will see all pay and pension pressures funded for schools, the current proposal is 1% but should it increase above that then there would be funding to support. It also recognises all the current demands on the additional learning needs budget. Members were provided with other pressures that were included in the budget that related to other services areas apart from education.

The education budget is 34.2% of the total Monmouthshire budget with social care and health being 31.2%, these are the two largest budgets.

Cllr P. Murphy presented the pressures and investments by directorate and outlined the key risks and uncertainties for each. One of the key risks is if Welsh Government withdraw the funding to support losses from the current pandemic and how that will affect services moving forward.

The pressures afforded to education are:

- £304k loss of summer term recoupment income with the closure of Mounton House.
- £118k cost of placements for the Monmouthshire pupils who were attending Mounton House at the time of closure.
- £75k for Educational Psychology linked to the new Additional Learning Needs Act.
- £21k for Early Years linked to the new Additional Learning Needs Act.
- £58k pressure for pupils with Additional Learning Needs placed in independent schools.

- £130k for pupils with Additional Learning Needs placed in other Local Authority schools.
- £494k for support for pupils with Additional Learning Needs placed in Monmouthshire schools.
- £431k for the pay award for teaching and non-teaching staff.

The savings for education are:

- £1.258m for the closure of Mounton House Special School.
- £252k additional recoupment income relating to other local authority pupils placed in Monmouthshire schools.

The capital programme for schools continues with band A being completed (Monmouth and Caldicot) with the new Abergavenny 3 – 19 school commencing in band B.

Members understood that all questions and comments would be added to the formal consultation process for Cabinet to consider and that the consultation period ends on the 17th February 2021.

The chair thanks Cllr P. Murphy for the presentation and asked members for any questions or comments. Members were pleased that the pay award had been afforded to schools, there were no further comments or questions. It was agreed to send the presentation to all members.

A6 Draft minutes of JAG (Joint Advisory Group) – 25th January 2021

Presentation regarding Monmouthshire County Council's Draft Budget Proposals 2021- 2022

The Cabinet Member for Resources, County Councillor P. Murphy, provided a presentation regarding Monmouthshire County Council's Draft Budget Proposals 2021-2022.

It was noted that the Foundation Phase Living Wage was being continued.

The consultation period will end on 17th February 2021 and final budget proposals will go to Cabinet on 3rd March 2021 and Full Council on 11th March 2021.

Items for discussion from the Trade Union Side

The following questions were raised via the Trade Union Side.

1. How has Monmouthshire County Council's allocation from the Welsh Government's £29m Recruit, Recover and Raise Standards funding been utilised?
2. Many other Local Authorities may have used their additional funding from this scheme to fund, via Supply Agencies, Teaching Assistants rather than qualified Supply Teachers. Has any part of this funding been used to support schools who may have employed supply teachers directly in Monmouthshire schools?

In response, the Chief Officer for Resources provided the Group with the following information:

- Of the £29m, the County Council will receive £547,000 which will span the academic year.

- Schools and the LEA have agreed the allocation methodology based on pupil numbers from the January 2020 PLASC data and from FSM data as at September 2020.
- In a smaller comprehensive school this equates to around £2000 to £3000 for the seven month period, which could be even lower for very small schools.
- Data shows an increase in FTE staffing into schools of 25.99 FTE.
- In relation to the second question, data is still being awaited. When received, this information will be forwarded to the Trade Union representatives. However, it was noted that the Chief Officer for Children and Young People has a robust mechanism in place for ensuring and following through with schools to ensure that the funding is being allocated correctly.

A further question was raised by the Trade Union Side regarding Ash Tree dieback disease in which there will be further pressure on schools budgets to maintain and keep these sites safe.

In response, the Chief Officer for Resources informed the Group that this matter was currently being addressed whereby dialogue was being undertaken between Monmouthshire County Council and Welsh Government. Discussions are addressing where the responsibility lies in terms of remedying the issue. It is anticipated that clarification from Welsh Government will be made available in due course in order to assist public bodies with addressing these issues. When clarification has been established from Welsh Government, this information will be made available to schools.

A7 Summary of MyMates livestream event – 21st January 2021

About MyMates: **MyMates is a friendship project for people with disabilities, run by Monmouthshire County Council.**

Taking part – Sarah Seabourne, Cllr Phil Murphy, Abigail Barton, Kemmine Parrish, Jan Whitham, Janet Cox, Tracy, and 13 others members of the MyMates group.

Cllr Phil Murphy talked through the budget presentation, starting with the overview.

Only two questions were submitted after the presentation, neither of which were connected to the budget proposals directly.

A8 Summary of Budget livestream event – 27th January 2021

About the session – open to all members of the public, advertised widely in the week before the event. A recording was made of the session and uploaded to the Monmouthshire County Council website on the /budget-2021-2022 page.

21 residents signed up for the livestream link, ten of whom pre-submitted questions, which have been answered.

LIVE QUESTIONS RECEIVED DURING THE SESSION

“Is it not now time for the council to challenge the settlement from Welsh Government?”

“I may have missed it, what happens to our pink and purple recycling if there is no longer a source of income from selling it on? Is it now incinerated rather than recycled?”

“Re the banding comparison, what is the actual monetary gain via residents given the volume of discount and Welsh Government support to these areas, suggesting real cost is less to individuals in those areas vs Monmouthshire?”

“It appears that Blaenau Gwent remains as a “high earner” from Welsh Government contributions, Monmouthshire County Council will never be able to achieve a higher proportion of the finances available.”

A9 Summary of Head Teachers meeting – 29th January 2021

Budget Presentation – Cllr Phil Murphy and Peter Davies

Cllr Murphy gave his presentation on the draft budget proposals for 2021/22 (attached).

It was noted that the consultation will run until the 17th February 2021.

Any comments to be sent to Nikki Wellington who will feed into the budget consultation via Peter Davies.

A10 Summary of Friday Friendly Young People Group – 29th January 2021

Budget Engagement with the Friday Friendly Group of young people took place 29th January 2021. The Budget Proposal video was played, then Cllr Phil Murphy answered questions submitted during the livestream.

Has MCC made any savings by furloughing people during lockdown? *Not as much as you would imagine. We reallocated staff to preserve jobs, and almost all services were still running. Even buildings, which were closed, still have running costs, whether or not they have people in them.*

Young people are saying we should not have a council tax rise – why? What is it for? *Cllr. Murphy explained the situation regarding the settlement from Welsh Government, and how to protect services the council tax would need to be raised. Cllr Murphy also gave a wide overview of all the services that are covered by the council.*

Do you think young people can make a valuable difference, and how? *Cllr Murphy said that a large section of volunteers across Monmouthshire are young people. He discussed how to get involved, and how important this work is for the community, and how beneficial for young people’s CVs.*

Will funds be taken away from education? *Cllr Murphy confirmed that there are no planned cuts in education.*

How is the money from investments, such as Spytty, used by the council? *The return from investments such as the leisure park (Spytty) helps to supplement other income from council tax and the Welsh Government settlement.*

Are we likely to see cuts in the future due to the cost of the pandemic? *Cllr Murphy confirmed that this could not be ruled out in the future.*

A11 Draft minutes of Town and Community Council Cluster meeting – 2nd February 2021

County Councillor Murphy opened the meeting and welcomed those present. The 2021/2022 Draft Budget Proposals presentation was introduced explaining the budget challenge. It was noted that Monmouthshire still receives the least funding per head of population compared to the rest of Wales. With this in mind the presentation outlined the council’s plan to continue to drive for efficiency and effectiveness regardless of the uncertainty of grant funding and significant pressures relating to on-going commitments and significant pressures of some unaccounted for demands.

QUESTIONS	
Despite maintaining service delivery year on year and the slightly above average provisional settlement this year, what non statutory services could potentially have to be curtailed	Hopefully nothing. Some flexibility on delivery. Some grant funded services could be vulnerable. Leisure services continue to generate income and community involvement which is anticipated to continue into the future. Working with the Community Councils has helped to sustain and maintain services
In future years, can the consultation on the MCC budget be launched earlier so that when Town Councils are setting their budgets that can be mindful of MCC proposals?	In order to tailor the budget we rely on the One Year Spending Review announcement but unfortunately the Welsh Government didn’t provide its provisional settlement until 22 nd December with the final announcement on 2 nd March. Hopefully the Chancellor will be able to return to the cycle of a multi-year spending review which will assist Welsh Government to issue settlement figures earlier enabling us to submit budget proposals in a more timely manner.
Town and Community Councils are key partners and discussions with regard to budget proposals and service delivery plans have evolved and matured. Are there other opportunities or shared partnership models where Town and Community Councils can support the unitary authority with a service offer but	Partnership working between the Council and Town and Community Councils is going to be inevitable going forward but on what basis remains to be seen. Comparison was made to four or five years ago when sharing financial responsibilities was at the forefront of maintaining services. An active line of approach which could well return. This is an active conversation with senior management at the moment to capitalise on and strengthen. Working closely with voluntary networks throughout the pandemic

<p>maybe a revenue return with profit sharing in the future?</p> <p>Gaps in domiciliary care?</p>	<p>has been invaluable and we want to maintain this relationship going forward.</p> <p>Opportunity to draw on social capital or monies set aside for covid recovery to be explored.</p>
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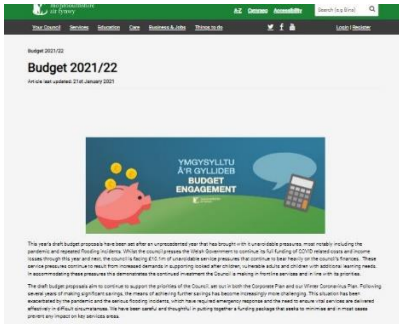
A12 Overview of Monmouthshire County Council budget engagement



Report on the engagement activities for the 2021/22 Budget Proposals

OVERVIEW

2021 has been a year that has brought challenges in light of the pandemic, which has made traditional face-to-face consultation activities not possible so every effort was made to reach as many people as possible, especially via online sessions and social media. The engagement activities were supported by a pro-active communications plan, which included:



Creation of a section on the website for all budget material in Welsh and English: [Monmouthshire.gov.uk/budget-2021-2022](https://www.monmouthshire.gov.uk/budget-2021-2022)



Cllr. Phil Murphy produced a **video** giving an overview of the proposals, uploaded to the page above, and shared across all social media
2021 consultation survey – link on the page above, which was promoted in all budget coverage



Budget Engagement Livestream open to all – on 27th January 2021 via Teams. 21 people signed up via a registration form on the webpage, which also gave an opportunity to pre-submit questions (in addition to being able to raise questions during the live event).

Video of the livestream with both English and Welsh subtitles – the livestream was recorded and was available to watch on the website, alongside the other Budget Proposal material throughout the consultation period.

MyMates – Teams meeting to present Budget Proposals to the group in January 2021. Excellent discussion and reflections.

Climate Change Champions have shared all budget information to its members.

All budget information cascaded with the Engage to Change group of young people during its Friday Friendly meeting (29th January 2021)

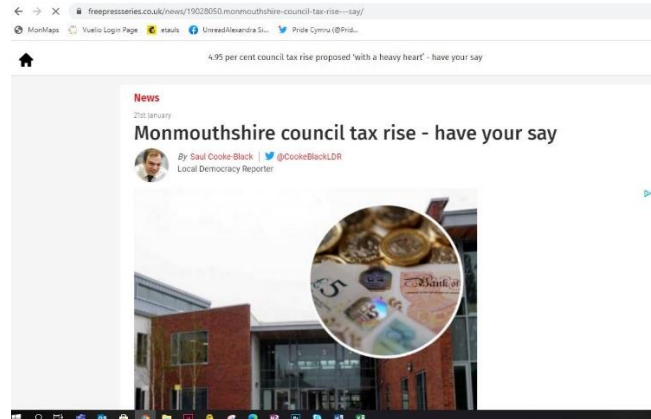
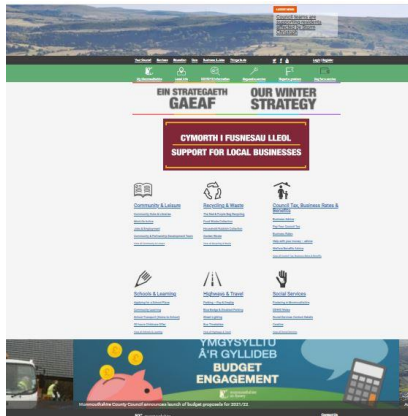
Friday Friendly – Teams meeting in which the Budget Proposals were discussed amongst a group of Young People on Friday 29th January 2021.

Cllr Murphy presented the budget proposals to the Children & Young People Select Committee

CONSULTATION LAUNCH

Launched on Wednesday 20th January 2021, the coverage included:

Press release issued to all press and added to the front page of [monmouthshire.gov.uk](https://www.monmouthshire.gov.uk). Articles appeared in several of the local papers, including the Free Press and the South Wales Argus.




SOCIAL MEDIA - Facebook and Twitter posts in Welsh and English with links to [Monmouthshire.gov.uk/budget-2021-2022](https://www.monmouthshire.gov.uk/budget-2021-2022). These posts were also shared on a regular basis, at various times of day, via a wide range of groups around in the county, extending their reach even further. The launch post on 20th January reached 1366 people, with 1416 impressions, while the 26th January post reached 2063 people, with 2219 impressions.

Post Details

Monmouthshire
Published by Jan Whitham
20 January at 16:15

Monmouthshire County Council announces launch of budget proposals for 2021/22. Find out more, register for a livestreamed event (taking place on 27/1/21) and send your feedback: bit.ly/3bWaoP7



MONMOUTHSHIRE.GOV.UK
Monmouthshire County Council announces launch of budget proposals f...

1 share

Like Comment Share

Performance for your post

1366 People reached

4 Likes, comments and shares

18 Post clicks

0 Photo views 16 Link clicks 2 Other Clicks

NEGATIVE FEEDBACK

0 Hide all posts 0 Hide post
0 Report as spam 0 Unlike Page

4 Likes, comments and shares

BRANDED CONTENT DISTRIBUTION **View Breakdown**


1366 Total reach	1366 Organic reach	0 Paid reach
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1416 Total impressions 1416 Organic impressions 0 Paid impressions

Post Details

Monmouthshire
Published by Tom Damsell
26 January at 11:39

BUDGET PROPOSALS 2021/22.
Cllr. Phil Murphy, Cabinet Member for Resources, discusses the Budget Proposals for 2021/22. Find out more and share your feedback via an online form at: <http://bit.ly/390qjbl>
Consultation period closes 17/2/21.



1 Like 3 comments 3 shares

Performance for your post

2063 People reached

9 Likes, comments and shares

137 Post clicks

32 Clicks to Play 12 Link clicks 93 Other Clicks

NEGATIVE FEEDBACK

0 Hide all posts 0 Hide post
0 Report as spam 0 Unlike Page

9 Likes, comments and shares


BRANDED CONTENT DISTRIBUTION **View Breakdown**

2063 Total reach	2063 Organic reach	0 Paid reach
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2219 Total impressions 2219 Organic impressions 0 Paid impressions

User @MonmouthshireCC

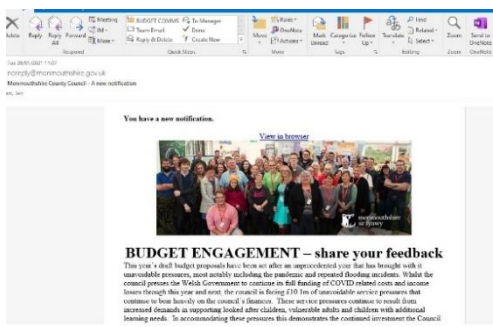
Monmouthshire @Monmouthshire...
Cynghor Sir Ffynwy yn cyhoeddi lansiad cymylion cyllideb ar gyfer 2021/22. Darganfyddwch fwy, cofrestrwch ar gyfer ddiwyddiad ffyddio'n fyw ac anfonwch eich sbortio: bit.ly/35VZ4WA



Monmouthshire @Monmouthshire...
Monmouthshire County Council announces launch of budget proposals for 2021/22. Find out more, register for a livestreamed event and send your feedback: bit.ly/3bWaoP7



Monmouthshire Retweeted
Paul Matthews @PaulMatthews07



The full release with links to the video, the detailed proposals and the survey was emailed to all **MyMonmouthshire** subscribers, reaching 12,173 people.

The Budget Proposals also featured on The Hub and the weekly emailed newsletter 'Compass', which reaches over 3,000 people within MCC's own staff base.

The Responses

291 residents responded to the survey prior to the consultation period closing on 17th February 2021. The largest response (219 people) was to the proposal to raise council tax by 4.95%, with strong objections raised.

Do you agree or disagree with the service pressures being accommodated for Education, and notably around children with additional learning needs?

170 (58.4%) of those who responded agreed

● Agree	170
● Disagree	121



Key themes from the 83 responses:

- Comments from those who disagreed included a feeling that funding was not reaching those most in “genuine” need, an impression that too many children were being identified as ALN leading to unnecessary spending.
- Those who agreed felt that supporting children with ALN was important, especially within mainstream schools and that money should be spent in this area and resources protected.

Do you agree or disagree with the proposals for Social Care and Health, both in terms of the service pressures being accommodated in Children’s and Adult Services, and the proposed increase in fees and charges?

164 (56.3%) of those who responded disagreed

● Agree	127
● Disagree	164



Key lines from the 63 responses:

- Those who agreed felt that vulnerable residents ought to be supported, and this was an important area in terms of protecting services.
- Those who disagreed felt that this was not the right time to use extra funds, and that more efficiencies ought to be made.
- A common theme was a feeling that MCC ought to go to Welsh Government to press for more funding in all areas in future, following another year where its settlement per capita was the lowest in Wales.
- Suggestions were made that too many private service providers were benefitting from increased charges, and that more should be covered in-house.

- The responses to this question also saw the proposed council tax rise mentioned as a factor – I'm all for social care, but not if it means raises taxes.

Do you agree or disagree with the services pressures being accommodated for Enterprise, and that significantly relate to service pressures being accommodated with Recycling & Waste, Homelessness and Transport?

163 (56%) of those who responded disagreed

● Agree	128
● Disagree	163



Key lines from the 66 responses:

- The recurring theme was objection to decisions already confirmed, such as the increase in charge for Green Garden Waste and the closure of Usk HWRC also featured in comments.
- A strong feeling that residents were not getting their money's worth in terms of services.
- Some expressed a lack of comprehension as to why reusable recycling bags were worth the money (as opposed to the current disposable bags)
- Suggestions were made - such as changing recycling collections from weekly to fortnightly.
- Views towards homelessness and transport were mixed, however a lack of support for investing funds in assisting homeless residents was expressed.

We are looking to make one-off use of limited reserves and capital receipts in order to support the budget this year and to allow service pressures to be accommodated and to less the burden on council tax payers. Do you agree or disagree with this approach?

232 (79.7%) of those who responded agreed

● Agree	232
● Disagree	59



We propose a 4.95% increase in Council Tax as a result of the significant financial challenges faced. Accepting that the Council Tax Reduction Scheme will provide support to those on low income and benefits, and 25% discount to single people. Do you agree or disagree?

256 (87.9%) of those who responded disagreed

● Agree
● Disagree

35

256



Frequent comments from the 219 responses:

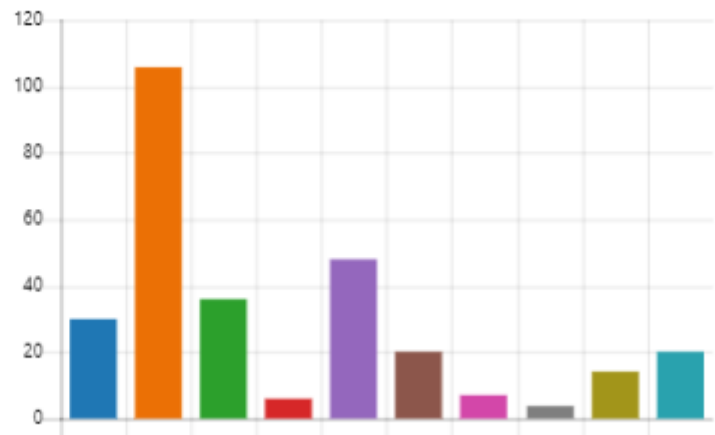
- The most frequent response was an expression of anger and disbelief that, at a time many have been furloughed or lost their jobs, an increase in council tax was ill-timed and unfair. Many commented that residents were already struggling to keep afloat as a result of the pandemic and its effect on jobs and income.
- This proposed rise is seen by many who responded as “yet another increase” in council tax, not due to any exceptional circumstances over the past year.
- There was also mention of Newport Leisure Park, with some misunderstanding by residents that this was funded by Council borrowing and generated a return to the Council that enabled them to sustain and maintain services.
- It was also suggested that the proposed increase should not be above the current inflation rate, that it was disproportionate.
- Some also commented in the fact that Monmouthshire receives the least funding per capita than any other LA in Wales and should petition harder for a better settlement.
- The impression that, during the pandemic, services have been “non-existent” and shut down, hence why should we pay more.
- Comments that road surfaces and flood protection measures are poor.
- An underlying theme appears to be a lack of clarity of where the money is being spent, especially over the past year. To many, it is felt that most services stopped being provided when the pandemic lockdowns started.

An overview of those who responded

The biggest response to the survey was from residents of Caldicot, who made up 36.4%, followed by Magor & Undy, at 16.49%. The age groups that responded most were 35-44 (21.6%), followed by 45-54 (21.3%) and 55-64 (18.2%). Those aged over 75 made up 4.46% of those who responded. 46.39% of residents who responded stated that they were Welsh, with 26.1% describing themselves as British. 48.4% of respondents were male. 13.05% of residents who responded stated that they had a disability as described by the Equality Act 2010.

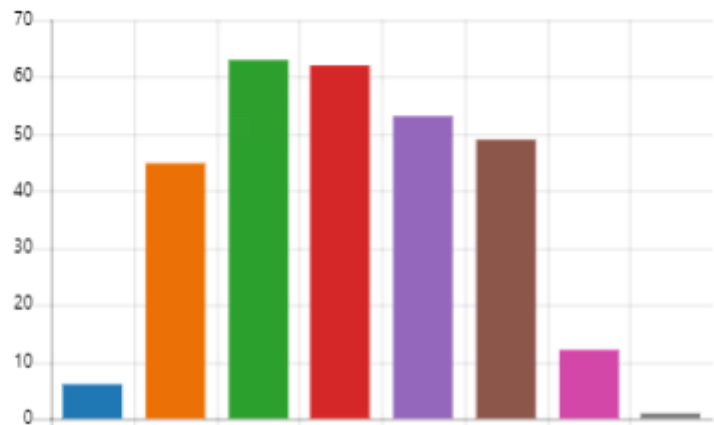
Where do you live (please state nearest town or village)

Abergavenny	30
Caldicot	106
Chepstow	36
Gilwern	6
Magor & Undy	48
Monmouth	20
Raglan	7
Tintern	4
Usk	14
Other	20



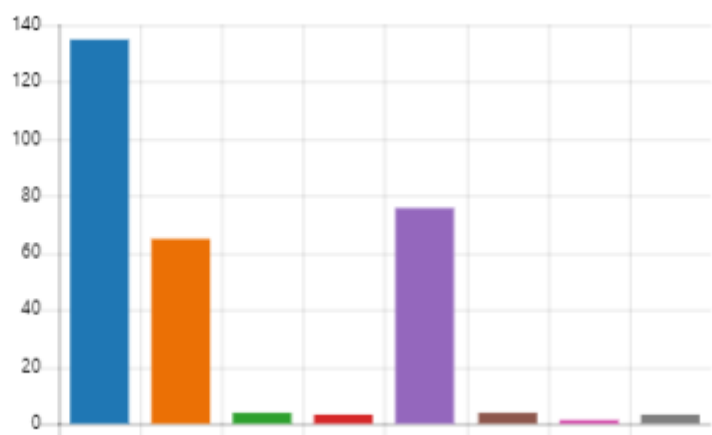
What age group do you fall within?

16-24	6
25-34	45
35-44	63
45-54	62
55-64	53
65-74	49
75-84	12
85+	1



Nationality

Welsh	135
English	65
Scottish	4
Irish	3
British	76
EU Citizen	4
Non-EU Citizen	1
Other	3



What gender do you identify as?

Female	134
Male	141
Non-binary	2
Prefer not to say	14



Disability is defined by the Equality Act 2010 as: A physical or mental impairment, which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on a person’s ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities. The disability could be physical, sensory or mental and must be expected to last at least 12 months. Do you consider yourself to have a disability as defined by the Equality Act?

Yes	38
No	253

