

‘Difficult Decisions’ Consultation – ‘You Said, We Did’

Purpose of the Consultation

The purpose of the Budget Consultation 2021-22 was to:

- Increase public understanding of the scale of financial challenge that the Council continues to face and why difficult decisions need to be made;
- Increase public knowledge of our reshaping journey since the first austerity measures were introduced in late 2008, following the economic crisis in 2007-08;
- Understand the views of the public and other key stakeholders regarding their ideas for further cuts during the 2021-22 financial year, in order to consider these views when making decisions.

Budget Consultation 2021-22 approach

Given the current extraordinary circumstances, the consultation period took place during a shortened window and was divided into two parts. Part 1 took place in the lead up to the provisional settlement being announced by Welsh Government (from 30/11/2020 to 13/12/2020). Part 2 took place after the provisional settlement was announced by Welsh Government (from 20/01/2021 to 05/02/2021).

A Your Voice survey was available in online and paper format during both phases of the consultation. Members of the public were also able to respond in writing or by email to a dedicated email account. A number of targeted emails were sent to specific stakeholder groups and representatives of groups with protected characteristics, for example, the Senedd yr Ifanc and Community Councils. In both phases of the consultation, a public information booklet was provided which included a reminder of the six agreed Council priorities (previously consulted upon in June-July 2019), reference to the ‘You Said, We Did’ feedback from the previous budget consultation and an update on Council Tax.

There were a total number of 299 responses to Part 1 of the consultation and 646 responses to Part 2 of the consultation. We would like to thank all those people and groups who took part.

A really important part of any consultation is feeding back to the participants about what has happened since they gave their opinions, and what effect their views have had. This process of feedback is about being able to show where your views have directly impacted on a proposal, and also explaining when there are times where we could not do everything suggested by the public (and explaining why).

So, we are now presenting this ‘You Said, We Did’ report to show you the final decisions that have been made about each of the proposals presented for consultation.

If you want to read all of the details about the proposals the Council made, and the results of the consultation, you will find a full report here. *(Please see Appendix 2. When this report is published on Your Voice Wrexham, these reports will be linked).*

What you told us

In Part 1 of our consultation, we asked the following questions:

1. How do you think we can make further cuts to meet the financial challenge?
2. If you have identified areas of Council expenditure for further cuts, do you have any alternative suggestions for provision of these services/areas of expenditure?

You Said:	We did:
Review senior/middle management structure and staff tiers	Wrexham’s senior management structure is one of the leanest in Wales following recent senior management restructures. We constantly keep this under review.
Review Council offices and assets - including how they can be better utilised	Our review of office building requirements has continued, and despite inevitable delays during Covid-19 lockdown, construction work has continued to progress well on the development of the council’s modern Community Health and Wellbeing Hub at the former Crown Buildings, Wrexham.
Other ideas for generating income	<p>Ideas for generating income arising from this consultation have been shared with departments for their consideration.</p> <p>Wrexham Council has a ‘Cost Recovery Policy’ which outlines principles for charging for its services. This policy establishes a framework within which fees and charges set by the Council are agreed and regularly reviewed, and also sets out the general principles by which the Council will operate. The policy contains guidelines to ensure that fees are set appropriately in order for us to recover our costs, whilst also delivering value to the public, at a price that is reasonable for the service.</p> <p>The Council has sought fully to recover costs where this is possible.</p>

You Said:	We did:
<p>Review Environmental Services - e.g. Reduction in Recycling, litter pickers, not collecting green bins in the winter, length of time between bin collections, improvements to roads etc..... involving people in improving their environment so that they share the responsibility and provide them with skills.</p>	<p>Wrexham Council is proud to be a part of the Caru Cymru project, which is led by Keep Wales Tidy. The vision is for Caru Cymru (meaning 'Love Wales') to be interwoven into life in Wales, so it becomes second nature for everyone to do the right thing, from taking litter home and cleaning up after your dog, to recycling 'on-the-go', reusing and repairing. We are working with community groups, schools and businesses to ensure that everyone is able to play their part in improving Wrexham. We're also keen to understand how well people are recycling their household waste, and how we could help them to improve their recycling. We'll be doing a number of surveys and engagement exercises to help us identify any positive improvements we can make.</p>
<p>Continue forward with the Modern Ways of Working which allows employees and Elected Members to work from home resulting in cost savings on running expensive, offices, travel expenses etc.. Invest in IT provisions</p>	<p>The council had already recognised the need to ensure a modern and resilient council prior to Covid-19, and has accelerated its modern ways of working programme, not only to meet these demands, but to use learning to unlock potential for future efficiencies. Since March 2020 the majority of employees, if their job lends itself to this, have been enabled to work flexibly and/or from home, balancing this with some time in the workplace.</p> <p>Investment in ICT infrastructure has taken place to ensure the council is able to provide a robust, resilient and secure platform to support the aims of a modern and resilient council.</p> <p>ICT and digital solutions have been rapidly developed to support the new working arrangements promoted by the Modern Ways of Working programme and accelerated by the Covid-19 pandemic.</p> <p>The availability of on-line services for customers has continued to improve with 24 additional services available online and more than 60,000 services requests received online during 2020/21.</p>
<p>Reduce or remove Elected Member pay/expenses including any pay rise</p>	<p>Councillors' pay is fixed by the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales set up by the Welsh Government to ensure a nationally consistent approach to Member remuneration. Individual Councils are not permitted to fix allowances outside the IRPW recommended scales.</p>

You Said:	We did:
<p>Process improvement within Departments so they are more efficient therefore further cuts are not required.</p>	<p>The Council's ICT and Digital Strategy 2020-23 aims to empower employees with the right technology and necessary support to work flexibly and cost-effectively. The strategy promotes the continuous improvement of services using data and business intelligence alongside exploiting new technology to improve outcomes for our service users.</p>
<p>Reduce the number of Elected Members</p>	<p>The Council does not determine the number of Councillors elected for the county borough. This is determined by the Welsh Government following recommendations from the Local Democracy and Boundary Commission for Wales. The most recent review was completed in 2021 and as a result the number of councillors will increase from 52 to 56 in May 2022. The Council had opposed this increase.</p>
<p>Do not feel that further cuts should be made.</p>	<p>The Council is required, by law, to maintain a balanced budget in a time when its funding is being cut. While the council never wishes to cut valued services it must meet this requirement which requires difficult choices about prioritisation.</p>
<p>Reduce consultant/external/third sector spend</p>	<p>As part of the Council's processes we will always consider whether a service could be delivered better, and /or more efficiently, and in partnership with others, if timescales and other factors allow us to do so.</p>
<p>Review staff terms and conditions (travel, benefits and expenses,) Freeze on vacancies</p>	<p>Council employees are subject to national pay and conditions, and some local collective arrangements with have been formally agreed with the recognised trade unions.</p> <p>The Council operates a vacancy management process whereby all proposed recruitment is reviewed to ensure opportunities for post changes and internal or redeployment appointments which may result in savings, are considered prior to recruitment to ensure that only essential recruitment takes place.</p> <p>Services review their staffing requirements/ structures through annual service planning and workforce planning exercises as to ensure they deliver the services they are committed to in the most resource effective way possible.</p>

You Said:	We did:
Remove/reduce the role of mayor	The Council is required to elect a civic head to chair major meetings and in Wrexham this role is fulfilled by the Mayor. The Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales determines the salaries for such roles, not the Council. The Council has been reducing overall expenditure in recent years and continues to take opportunities to achieve greater efficiencies in delivering this service. This service is valued in many parts of our community.
Departments across the Council to work more collaboratively - resulting in reducing costs and being more efficient across services	Departments within the Council are working in collaboration to reduce costs and increase efficiencies, for example in the roll out of the Modern Ways of Working programme, the ongoing review of office building requirements and development of a Prevention and Early Help Framework in order to support children, young people and families.

In Part 2 of the consultation, we asked the following question:

- What do you think about the approach the Council is taking to setting the budget for 2021-22?

You said:	We did:
Consider the financial effect of Covid-19 on families / people who have lost jobs / been furloughed /on low incomes / reduced earnings	<p>As part of Wrexham Public Service Board (PSB), we have identified the need to improve community resilience. One of these pieces of work is focused on reducing inequality and poverty as we recover from the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.</p> <p>The Council's budget approach is about prioritising resources to ensure that essential services are sustainable and resilient, including prioritising the most vulnerable in society.</p>
Disagree with Council Tax increase	The Council recognizes the impact that council tax rises have on local people and needs to balance this with the potential impacts on services provided to those people if increases are not made.
The Council wastes money / more efficient and effective use of resources needed	<p>If the Council is to deliver on its priorities and maintain financial stability over the medium term, it will need to continuously deliver efficiency savings and generate additional income.</p> <p>Much of previous years' savings have been in the form of efficiencies, so in 2021/22 there is only a limited amount left in this area, but the Council will continue to work hard to identify and deliver these.</p>
Agree with approach to setting the budget	The Council has a well-established process for budget setting.
Review number of staff / staff terms and conditions / staff roles	<p>The Council operates a vacancy management process whereby all proposed recruitment is reviewed to ensure opportunities for post changes, internal or redeployment appointments which may result in savings, are considered prior to recruitment to ensure that only essential recruitment takes place.</p> <p>Council employees are subject to national pay and conditions, and some local collective agreements which have been formally agreed with the recognised trade unions.</p> <p>Services review their staffing requirements/ structures through annual service planning and</p>

You said:	We did:
	workforce planning exercises to ensure they deliver the services they are committed to in the most resource effective way possible.
Fewer services/poor quality service for the increasing cost of Council Tax	In order to avoid cuts to services valued by the people of Wrexham, the Council continues to explore alternative options of service delivery to ensure that they remain fit for purpose in the context of smaller budgets. This may mean revisiting the expectations of residents in order to prioritise services for the most vulnerable. It is also an opportunity to work with partners to maintain and improve outcomes against a backdrop of reducing public spending.
Reduce number of Councillors / expenditure on Councillors	<p>The Council does not determine the number of Councillors elected for the county borough. This is determined by the Welsh Government following recommendations from the Local Democracy and Boundary Commission for Wales. The most recent review was completed in 2021 and as a result the number of councillors will increase from 52 to 56 in May 2022. The Council had opposed this increase.</p> <p>The Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales determines the salaries for councillors, not the Council.</p>
Carry out regular maintenance work (e.g. on roads and drainage systems)	We continue to inspect our highways in line with our policies, and our performance figures show that we have improved significantly. We continue to review our policies to ensure that they are appropriate and meet best practice, and we look for opportunities to improve our road network.
Critical of Council's decision making processes/previous suggestions not taken on board/need to improve effectiveness of consultation process	The financial challenges facing the Council heighten the need to involve citizens to increase public understanding of the rationale for change and why difficult decisions have to be made. Through clear communication, consultation and engagement we can help manage public expectations, as well as understand their views on the way forward, so they can influence the future shape of local services.
Reduce spend on Council assets	The Council has made positive progress in adopting new ways of working and these will continue to be embraced and embedded; transforming our working practices by providing improved working environments, adapting new

You said:	We did:
	technology and digital solutions to make our work more sustainable. This will be achieved through the continued delivery of our office accommodation review programme over the coming years.
Critical of Welsh Government settlement / challenge Welsh Government's approach	We continue to lobby Welsh Government for a fair and sustainable settlement which reflects the needs of our communities.
Review the Mayoral role	The Council has been reducing overall expenditure in recent years and continues to take opportunities to achieve greater efficiencies in delivering this service.

Difficult Decisions 2021-22 Consultation

Key Findings

Purpose of the Consultation

The purpose of the Difficult Decisions 2021-22 consultation was to:

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- Increase public knowledge of our reshaping journey since the first austerity measures were introduced in late 2008, following the economic crisis in 2007/2008;
- Understand the views of the public and other key stakeholders regarding their ideas for further cuts during the 2021-22 financial year, in order to consider these views when making decisions.

Difficult Decisions 2021-22 Consultation Approach

Given the current extraordinary circumstances, the consultation period took place during a shortened window and was divided into two parts. Part 1 took place in the lead up to the provisional settlement being announced by Welsh Government (from 30.11.20 to 13.12.20). Part 2 took place after the provisional settlement was announced by Welsh Government (from 20.01.21 to 05.02.21).

A Your Voice survey was available in online and paper format during both phases of the consultation. Members of the public were also able to respond in writing or by email to a dedicated email account. A number of targeted emails were sent to specific stakeholder groups and representatives of groups with protected characteristics, for example, the Senedd yr Ifanc and Community Councils. In both phases of the consultation, a public information booklet was provided which included a reminder of the six agreed Council priorities (previously consulted upon in June-July 2019), reference to the 'You Said, We Did' feedback from the previous budget consultation and an update on Council Tax.

In Part 1, the public were asked to respond to the following questions:

1. How do you think we can make further cuts to meet the financial challenge?
2. If you have identified areas of Council expenditure for further cuts, do you have any alternative suggestions for provision of these services/areas of expenditure?

In Part 2 of the consultation, the public were asked to respond to the following question:

1. What do you think about the approach the Council is taking to setting the budget for 2021-22?

Responses

Part 1 - There were a total number of 299 responses to Part 1 of the consultation, consisting of 298 responses to the online survey and 1 letter.

Part 2 – There were a total number of 646 responses to Part 2 of the consultation, consisting of 643 responses to the online survey and 3 emails. The 646 responses in total generated 279 comments for analysis in response to the approach the Council is taking to setting the budget for 2021-22. 367 responses to the online survey did not include comments, however 356 of these respondents provided information about their role in the community and 114 additionally provided some demographic and equality data.

Statistical Significance

Part 1 - Based on 298 responses received, and where the sample of participants is representative of the whole population, would give a Confidence Level of 95%¹ and a Confidence Interval of 5.67%².

Part 2 - Based on 646 responses received, and where the sample of participants is representative of the whole population, would give a Confidence Level of 95% and a Confidence Interval of 3.85%.

¹ A **confidence level** is an expression of how confident a researcher can be of the data obtained from a sample. Confidence levels are expressed as a percentage and indicate how frequently that percentage of the target population would give an answer that lies within the confidence interval.

² A **confidence interval** is the margin of error that a researcher would experience if he or she could ask a particular research question, say, of every member of the target population and receive the same answer back that the members of the sample gave in the survey.

Part 1 - Survey Analysis

Members of the public were asked to respond to two open questions outlined above. This yielded a set of 299 qualitative comments for analysis. Comments received in the survey were analysed and coded/themed. For each suggestion, the total number of comments received is shown. The most commonly occurring codes/themes have been highlighted below, along with the number of comments received related to that code/theme.

Summary of responses to the online survey and letter:

Question 1: How do you think we can make further cuts to meet the financial challenge?

Theme of response	Number of responses
Review Council offices and assets - including how they can be better utilized	25
Reduce or remove Elected Member pay/expenses including any pay rise	23
Review senior/middle management structure and staff tiers	22
Reduce the number of Elected Members	19
Income generation suggestions/ideas e.g. invest in digital services to realise efficiencies, better working across council departments, share resources with other local authorities, work with community councils to mitigate against cuts, no cuts for non-statutory services which contribute to communities' well-being.	19
Review Environmental Services - e.g. Reduction in Recycling, litter pickers, not collecting green bins in the winter, length of time between bin collections, improvements to roads etc..... involving people in improving their environment so that they share the responsibility and provide them with skills.	18
Do not feel that further cuts should be made.	17
Continue forward with the Modern Ways of Working which allows staff and Elected Members to work from home resulting in cost savings on running expensive, offices, travel expenses etc.. Invest in IT provisions	17
Process improvement within Departments so they are more efficient therefore further cuts are not required.	16
Review staff terms and conditions (travel, benefits and expenses,) Freeze on vacancies	12
Reduce consultant/external/third sector spend	12
Remove/reduce the role of mayor	11
Departments across the Council to work more collaboratively - resulting in reducing costs and being more efficient across services	10

Letter (one response):

Theme of response
Do not feel that further cuts should be made.
Review senior/middle management structure and staff tiers.
Review Council offices and assets, including how they might be better utilised.

Question 2: If you have identified areas of Council expenditure for further cuts, do you have any alternative suggestions for provision of these services/areas of expenditure?

Theme of response	Number of responses
Review senior/middle management structure and staff tiers	12
Continue forward with the Modern Ways of Working which allows staff and Elected Members to work from home resulting in cost savings on running expensive, offices, travel expenses etc.. Invest in IT provisions	7
Income generation suggestions/ideas e.g. Invest in the town centre to support businesses and attract visitors, consider outsourcing some services, streamlining services, investing in income generation.	7
Process Improvement within Departments so they are more efficient therefore further cuts are not required.	6
Review Environmental Services - e.g. Reduction in Recycling, litter pickers, not collecting green bins in the winter, length of time between bin collections, improvements to roads etc..... involving people in improving their environment so that they share the responsibility and provide them with skills.	6
Remove/reduce the role of mayor	5
Reduce consultant/external/third sector spend	5
Review staff terms and conditions (travel, benefits and expenses,) Freeze on vacancies	4
Review Council offices and assets - Including how they can be better utilised	4

Part 2 - Survey Analysis

Members of the public were asked to respond to one open question outlined above. This yielded a set of 279 qualitative comments for analysis. Comments received were analysed, coded and themed. The most commonly occurring themes have been highlighted below, which includes the number of comments received related to that theme.

Summary of responses to Part 2 of the consultation:

Question: What do you think about the approach the Council is taking to setting the budget for 2021-22?

Theme	Number of responses
Consider the financial effect of Covid-19 on families / people who have lost jobs / been furloughed /on low incomes / reduced earnings	84
Disagree with Council Tax increase	56
The Council wastes money / more efficient and effective use of resources needed	51
Agree with approach to setting the budget	32
Review number of staff / staff terms and conditions / staff roles	30
Fewer services/poor quality service for the increasing cost of Council Tax	28
Reduce number of Councillors / expenditure on Councillors	22
Carry out regular maintenance work (e.g. on roads and drainage systems)	20
Critical of Council's decision making processes/previous suggestions not taken on board/need to improve effectiveness of consultation process	19
Reduce spend on Council assets	13
Critical of Welsh Government settlement / challenge Welsh Government's approach	12
Review the Mayoral role	12

Part 1 - 'About You' Section of the Survey

295 people answered one or more of the questions in the 'About You' section of the survey during Part 1 of the consultation. The analysis of the data by group is based on these responses.

About You Data

This data was gathered from respondents to the consultation survey only.

All respondents were asked to complete a mandatory question 'Are you responding to this consultation as an individual or on behalf of a group?'

298 people responded to this question

Are you ...	Number	Percentage
Individual	296	99.3%
Group	2	0.7%

Response to the remainder of the 'About You' questions was optional and was therefore not completed by all survey respondents. In total 295 people responded to the question below:

Are you ...	Number	Percentage
A Local Resident	211	70.8%
An Employee of Wrexham County Borough Council	67	22.5%
An Elected Member of Wrexham County Borough Council	0	0.0%
An Elected Town or Community Councillor in Wrexham County Borough	9	3.0%
A Service Provider	2	0.7%
Other	6	2.0%

In total, 145 people responded to some or all of the questions below:

151 people responded to the question: What is your age?

What is your age?	Number	Percentage
0-15 years	1	0.7%
16-24	6	4.0%
25 – 34	8	5.3%
35 – 44	25	16.6%
45 – 54	45	29.8%
55 – 64	39	25.8%
65 – 74	26	17.2%
75+	1	0.7%

151 people responded to the question: What is your gender?

What is your gender?	Number	Percentage
Male	52	34.4%
Female	97	64.2%
Other	2	1.3%

147 people responded to the question: Are your day-to-day activities limited because of a health problem or disability which has lasted, or is expected to last, at least 12 months?

Are your day-to-day activities limited because of a health problem or disability which has lasted, or is expected to last, at least 12 months?	Number	Percentage
Yes – limited a lot	11	7.3%
Yes – limited a little	14	9.3%
No	115	76.2%
Prefer not to say	7	4.6%

148 people responded to the question: What is your ethnic group?

What is your ethnic group?	Number	Percentage
White	137	92.6%
Mixed/multiple ethnic groups	0	0%
Asian/Asian British	2	1.4%
Black/African/Caribbean/Black British	0	0%
Other ethnic group	3	2%
Prefer not to say	6	4.1%

146 people responded to the question: What is your preferred language?

What is your preferred language?	Number	Percentage
English	136	93.2%
Welsh	10	6.8%
Other	0	0.0%

Part 2 - 'About You' Section of the Survey

353 people in total answered one or more of the questions in the 'About You' section of the survey during Part 2 of the consultation. The analysis of the data by group is based on these responses.

All respondents to the survey were asked to complete a mandatory question 'Are you responding to this consultation as an individual or on behalf of a group?'

643 people responded to this question.

Are you ...	Number	Percentage
Individual	639	99.4%
Group	4	0.6%

Response to the remainder of the 'About You' questions was optional and was therefore not completed by all survey respondents. In total 631 people responded to the question below:

Are you ...	Number	Percentage
A Local Resident	471	74.6%
An Employee of Wrexham County Borough Council	135	21.4%
An Elected Member of Wrexham County Borough Council	1	0.2%
An Elected Town or Community Councillor in Wrexham County Borough	12	1.9%
A Service Provider	3	0.5%
Other	9	1.4%

In total, 353 people responded to some or all of the questions below:

343 people responded to the question 'What is your age?'

What is your age?	Number	Percentage
0-15 years	1	0.3%
16-24	2	0.6%
25 – 34	29	8.5%
35 – 44	58	16.9%
45 – 54	102	29.7%
55 – 64	88	25.7%
65 – 74	56	16.3%
75+	7	2.0%

340 people responded to the question 'What is your gender?'

What is your gender?	Number	Percentage
Male	140	41.2%
Female	199	58.5%
Other	1	0.3%

338 people responded to the question 'Are your day-to-day activities limited because of a health problem or disability, which has lasted, or is expected to last, at least 12 months?'

Are your day-to-day activities limited because of a health problem or disability, which has lasted, or is expected to last, at least 12 months?	Number	Percentage
Yes – limited a lot	17	5.0%
Yes – limited a little	42	12.4%
No	268	79.3%
Prefer not to say	11	3.3%

332 people responded to the question 'What is your preferred language?'

What is your preferred language?	Number	Percentage
English	315	94.9%
Welsh	17	5.1%
Other	0	0.0%