

Annex 7: Feedback from Viewpoint Panel Meeting

Group 1

Part 1 - To identify the proposed savings that are most agreed and disagreed with

Disagree

- Leave School Meal prices as they are already too expensive. (5 of 8)
- 2% reduction in school budgets – (5 of 8) – unhappy with this, would prefer school budgets be left alone.
- Cuts to rights of way budget (7 of 8) unhappy with this as paths not maintained well enough by the council already.
- Voluntary Sector cuts (8 of 8) disagreed with this; due to cuts to council services voluntary sector support for the community is even more vital.
- Community centre caretaker hour reduction – (5 of 8) felt a service review, with representatives from community centre management committees, needed to be conducted before any decision on this should be made. It was felt that in conducting a service review the available funds would go to the correct community centres and there may be a natural and greater saving available.
- Closing Trehir tip – residents were against the closure of the tip (6 out of 8). With no alternative proposed it was felt that this would increase the incidence of fly tipping. There was confusion as to why the tip was closing as residents were under the impression it was a well-used facility.
- Charging residents to dispose of rats. – (3 of 8) were against the council charging residents to dispose of rats as it isn't always the fault of the individual who's affected/ reporting it. Also it was felt that the administration involved for such a small charge outweighed the income.

Agree

- £800k one off contribution to Social Services agreed by everyone.
- Additional income from visitor centres welcomed by everyone.
- Cancellation of Blackwood to Ystrad link – felt that this was acceptable as there is an alternative and the service 'isn't very reliable anyway'.
- Being more efficient – Education & Lifelong Learning (A) – agree to all of these proposals.
- Section E – Agree to this – can more be done to increase this saving?
- Sale of Ynyshywel farm – seems a sensible option.

Part 2 – Identify suggestions for alternative ways to achieve the required savings

- Correct maintenance of refuse vehicles – constantly spilling expensive oil, down the streets. This could be prevented if the vehicles were maintained correctly.
- Council buildings - lighting needs to follow the same as resident's street lighting and be turned off between 12-5:30 am. This was a very contentious issue that all the residents felt very strongly about.
- Stop using Microsoft products as they're too expensive – Linux products are much cheaper and are equally as good.
- Charge production price for meals on wheels (not subsidised). –This divided opinion.
- Mayors Car/ Civic Diners/ Expenses – are theses needed? Can they be reduced?
- Ensure there are no pay rises for the highest paid council officers.
- Better planning to ensure that provision can be made to care for the elderly within their communities and reduce the strain on services.
- Sickness levels – Greater investment in staff Well-being! Happy environment to work in, increased productivity, less sick leave, more cost effective.

- Collaborative working with other council where it benefits us.
- There needs to be a review of how we meet the educational needs of young people with complex learning difficulties and look at how much money is spent on services that could potentially be provided more effectively.

Part 3 – Delivering Services Differently

- Take voluntary sector seriously, much more collaborative working. Promote the work that they do and the services that they provide. Use Newsline – Dedicated Section – Explain what they do.
- There needs to be more Social Housing – so many people on 0hr contracts unable to get rental agreement or mortgage. This needs to remain separate from Council Housing and needs to raise standards of living.
- More work needs to be done around vacant properties in terms of bringing them back into the housing stock and also in terms of the aesthetics of the community.

Group 2

Part 1 – to identify the proposed savings that are most agreed and disagreed with:

| Proposals most disagreed with: | Reasons |
|---|---|
| Public protection – Review Pest Control Fees and Charges and introduce a charge for rat treatments (D). | One gentleman has concerns over his neighbours feeding the birds, which causes rats and pests. Through 'no fault of himself or CCBC' he has used the pest control twice and the neighbours are still feeding the birds. Also people may not report it to the authority as they don't have the money to pay for the service. |
| Music Service (A). | Concerns over losing the service as there are benefits of music for mental health and well being. Families are unable to afford private music lessons. |
| Youth Service Reduction (C). | An ASD youth club is well used in Crumlin which is now under the youth service, this is the only support available in the area for this specific age group. |
| Expanding recycling centre in to Penallta Park (B). | As it a tourist attraction, concerns that putting rubbish close to the park will have a negative impact. Also concerns of the knock on effects of fly tipping. |
| Education and lifelong learning (C). | Worried about these 2% reduction occurring every year for 3 years, also the afterschool clubs. One resident explained that afterschool clubs always get cut and they have been where his children thrived and became more resilient. |
| Public Protection – decommission all BT line rental cameras (C) | As the street lights have been turned off there were concerns over the safety of residents. |
| Service Reduction / Cuts – Corporate Policy: reduction in voluntary sector budget. | The information in the document given haven't given enough detail for example percentages and impact. |

| Proposals most agreed with: | Reasons |
|---|--|
| Education and lifelong learning – Deleting vacant posts (A) | If there are not the people to hire for the jobs then they agreed with not re hiring. |
| Reductions of community safety wardens (C). | The general consensus was that the wardens weren't 'seen' much around the borough and if they are then it is usually in twos in the same area. |
| Corporate Policy – Reduction in utility costs (A) | The council offices (specifically mentioned a housing office) that has the lights on every evening and weekend. |

Part 2 – identify suggestions for alternative ways to achieve the required savings:

- Council to turn the lighting off as it is on in evenings and mornings,
- Hold meetings in public libraries, publicise them and the different things you can actually do at a library (family history as an example), hold open days and use newspapers/other methods of advertisement not just online.
- Volunteers in libraries to help with the library processes,
- Try to engage more younger people in education about communities own responsibilities.

Part 3 – looking in to the future, to identify ways of delivering services differently and how we can work together with our communities:

- Increase car park charging by for example 10p and use that income in invest in to public transport services such as buses.
- An idea that they use in a borough In Nottingham, to charge staff £400 per year for staff parking on site.

- Utilise empty council properties, use for housing shortages but also enforcement with charges of vacant properties that are privately owned.
- Sell old council properties.
- Charge for some library services.
- Community centres have inconsistencies, for example Abercarn community groups are raising money for events. It would be beneficial to share this best practice to other community groups.
- Incentives for schools and young people for helping the community, for example cinema tickets for a trash walk.
- Possibility to merge Libraries and CAB together so that you could pop in to borrow a book and get information at the same time, if they were then in the same building the old empty one could be turned into housing and sold to create income for the LA.

Group 3

Part 1: Which of the proposals do you particularly disagree with?

- Youth Service – concerns about withdrawal of top up grant funding
- **Grants to voluntary sector**
- Reductions in carriageway resurfacing – due to impact on public safety
- Disagree more with proposals with a high public impact vs low
- **CCTV cameras – act as a deterrent for crime in outlying villages**, particularly since the introduction of part-night lighting – security/wellbeing concerns
- Opportunity to explore wind/solar/3G/4G options?
- Important to define the role of Community Councils... can they help pick up some services the council can no longer deliver? Important to redefine the relationship
- **Wellbeing budget** – concerns for these residents – help promote independence
- Council tax is going up and level of service the council provides is going down

Highlighted topics (in bold) were where there was a general consensus

Part 1: Which of the proposals do you particularly agree with?

- Reduction in printing costs – option of having an electronic version... e.g. Newline
- The nil public impact proposals
- **Funding withdrawal acceptable in profit making/sustainable areas**
- Ice Rink
- Community Centres etc
- Community Council support should be used instead
- Managerial/back office savings

Highlighted topics (in bold) were where there was a general consensus

Part 2: Suggestions for other ways of saving money:

- More preventative measures – e.g. NYAS – providing support for families in difficulty – savings to be made through reducing demand on social services and increasing education
- A joined up approach to address ACEs (adverse childhood experiences)
- More SRB's for children with challenging behaviour – cheaper in the long run and better for the child – less travel costs etc to schools many miles away
- Greater use of Community Payback through Probation Service
- Greater visibility of enforcement activity in the area – act as a deterrent to littering/fly-tipping
- Home-School transport costs – consideration of only accommodating to the statutory level?
- Encouraging greater take-up of the PDG grant in schools – beneficial financially to the school as well as the individuals/families

Part 3: Working with our communities in the future:

- Start a conversation with residents – more meetings, greater understanding
- Ask the communities themselves what they need
- School canteens – dual use of kitchens for meals on wheels – cheaper and less wastage
- Importance of Community Council's role – although patchy coverage currently – doesn't cover every village
- Invest to save is needed sometimes – to enable people to do more for themselves in the long run
- Community empowerment
 - Litter picks etc – some excellent work already being done
 - 'We need to help ourselves sometimes'

- Importance of improving dialogue with residents – greater understanding
 - Open house/open days to showcase council services
 - Like the idea of using vacant shops in town centres to do this
- Reduce travel costs to schools through ideas like walking bus
- Highlighted the important role that councillors have to play in communicating the messages to residents
- Pride in the council/area – important that residents feel part of the process (i.e. that the council is not doing things TO residents but WITH them)

Group 4 (Young People)

Part 1: Which of the proposals do you particularly disagree with?

- Increase in school meal prices – too expensive if you have multiple children
- Reduction in cleansing staff numbers – Their jobs are hard enough without having to lose more jobs
- Closure of Trehir HWRC – Could result in more fly-tipping
- Withdrawal of contribution to Community Environmental Warden Service – We need clean communities
- Delete vacant post – language support primary – essential support required
- Increase price of meals on wheels – people can't help it if they can't leave their home or cook for themselves
- Reduction in playground maintenance budget – parks are already in a poor condition
- Reduction in voluntary sector budget – would agree with a lower cut such as £20,000
- Reduction in street lighting maintenance budget – street lights already bad quality
- Further reduction in wellbeing budget – need to take care of the environment and goes against the point of working with the community to save money in the long run
- Merge the Community Safety Wardens with the Enforcement Team - crime rates might rise because of a reduction in monitoring
- Reduction in war memorial maintenance budget – small savings, so wouldn't make a lot of difference to budget saving, but means a lot to residents
- Withdrawal of subsidy to Blackwood to Ystrad Link – the existing service is not frequent enough as it is. This link is used by commuters so could affect employment
- Youth Service – deletion of admin post – youth workers need face to face with young people, not doing admin
- Reduction in traffic management maintenance budget – it already needs improvement
- Reduction in cemeteries maintenance budget – already in need of improvement. No need for budget cut.
- Reduction in top up to grant funded youth service projects – All young people in the group benefits from youth services so didn't want to make this cut
- Withdraw school crossing patrol sites that no longer meet the national standards criteria – children may not know how to cross the road safely
- Reduction in carriageway maintenance budget – agree with lower cut, but not this much.

Part 1: Which of the proposals do you particularly agree with?

- Review pest control charges and introduce charge for rat treatments – Don't think it would affect that many residents to pay
- Bowling green rationalisation – not popular
- 14 to 19 initiative transport costs – no impact
- Delete vacant post – adult education – no impact to the public
- 2% reduction in schools budget – schools spend too much money on stuff that is unnecessary
- Blackwood Miners – reduced box office opening hours – a lot of people buy tickets online
- Education welfare restructure – no impact – already happened
- Gwent Sensory + Communication Support Unit – 1% reduction – minimal saving to project
- Increase charges for bulky waste collections – it's not very often you need to remove bulky items – if you can pay for a new appliance, you can pay to get rid of it
- Deletion of 2 community librarian posts – doesn't have much of an impact on teenagers
- Reduction in building cleaning at Ty Penallta – already happened and OK
- Delete music teacher post – not a popular subject with majority of students
- Winding House – budget realignment – not used often with young people

Young people felt most strongly about:

- **Do not increase meals on wheels prices**
- **Ystrad-Blackwood Link**
- **Reduction in highways budget**

Part 2:

- Generally, communities are not very respectful
- Young people feel schools waste budgets, technology, music equipment etc. – upgrade instead of replace
- More support for people to be active in their communities e.g. litter picks

Additional Written Comments following discussion

- Greater support for GAVO and voluntary sector organisations to release potential and encourage volunteers who are very good value.
- Lights out at Tredomen park or reduce.
- 2% education cut NO WAY.
- Cancel Mayors Car
- Reduce charges to school meals Collaborative working with other councils.
- Youth services paramount.
- Sell off old council properties.
- Keep Trehir waste centre open or there will be more rubbish on the side of the road Maintenance of larger council vehicles, particularly refuse trucks – everyone observed over last 6 months, excessive amounts of very expensive hydraulic oil leaking all day every day.
- Engage with the youth to help their communities.
- Talk to all ages to see how they can support their areas.
- Visit community groups and use volunteers from within the community.
- Promote voluntary sector services so people are more aware of them i.e. Newsline.
- Letting people know about what voluntary organisations exist that they might wish to join.
- Invest in time banking scheme to encourage citizens to become active in delivering local services.
- Advertise voluntary jobs e.g. litter picks to a greater degree.
- Help set up 'eco groups' which can be a mixture of children and adults.
- Library 'Volunteering'
- Incentivise young people to be community minded, through schools/education.
- Incentivise volunteers to do some of the less attractive jobs such as litter picking (removal of chewing gum, cigarette ends, litter, dog mess, and graffiti). Incentives could be reduction in council tax (adults), kids 10-16 years old (free cinema tickets), free parking for adults that volunteer.
- The community and town councils to consult on the prioritisation of local services and development. Identify needs for local residents and find solutions.
- More meetings with residents – Communication. Give ideas and talk about things we don't understand/ open days etc.
- More Traffic/Litter wardens
- Enforcement for littering/ number plate recognition etc, increase the fines for those that cause the mess.
- Implement charges for some help sessions in libraries.
- More advice to the public e.g. closing times for external lights etc.
- Changes to be made. What's available, to get it in the Newsline Paper.
- To deliver a better (cheaper) service needs a mind-set of people wanting to deliver this service.
- Social housing – more needed due to 0 hour contracts. Housing associations may get more grants than the council, and will do their own maintenance.
- Look after young people otherwise problems with substance misuse, there needs to be alternative careers. Selling drugs and carrying knives if youth employment is not encouraged.
- Care for staff to reduce illness.
- Why are we building more buildings when there are already so many houses up for sale?
- Communities use their community Centres better and use the centre's to engage the residents to help volunteer for tidying up their own area.
- Better usage of local community centres to support the council and make positive changes to their own areas.
- Monthly skips to collect large items within the community for free - this will reduce fly tipping (£15 for large item removal).

- Many families struggling – encourage community to collect recycling which they can earn money from to put money back into the community.
- Share best practice across the borough in community activity and inter action to use and roll out across other communities.
- Make us more effective as a council – even if it affects our pockets.
- Meet up with local groups, eco warriors, children in our community who want to collect litter in the community, meet up with our parent network groups.
- Fundraising for any project in the community.
- Can we use the Health board community connectors to make the links with council services? Disseminate information and feedback.
- Use existing buildings – empty flats, shops, units etc.
- Changing uniform – disagree, costs more money.
- Council working with communities to do litter picks and help take pride in their communities.
- Don't bring outside agencies in to teach subjects that you can teach yourselves.
- 'We' clean up the communities instead of the council paying people to do it.
- Initiative around best kept village.
- More awareness in school with reference to litter.
- Active travel – employ/ volunteer – people to lead walking buses/ cycling. Health benefit and possible decrease in transport budget.
- More wildflower planting on verge, fruit/ veg/ herb planting in community parks/ areas.

Voting on Council Tax increase

I support the proposed increase

I'd support a lower increase

Would be prepared to pay an even greater increase

I do not support any increase in council tax