
FINANCE, MODERNISATION & PERFORMANCE STATEMENT

Budget Consultation 2024/25

The Provisional Settlement from the Welsh Government, which was announced on 20 December 2023, includes a 4.1% increase for Cardiff, which would provide an additional £25.5m cash in 2024/25, which leaves a budget gap of £30.5m that needs to be addressed by the Council in order to balance the books in the next financial year. This gap will need to be filled by cuts to council services, efficiency savings and increases in charges like Council Tax. No final decision has been made at this stage, and proposals will be finalised prior to the Full Council Budget meeting in early March.

Following the Provisional Settlement, the Cabinet agreed the budget consultation for 2024/25 at a meeting on 8 January 2024, which then started later that day and will run for around four weeks until midnight on Sunday 4 February. The consultation sets out the potential changes to council services which are being considered, including:

- Considering charging for collection of garden waste
- Saving money by collecting black bin/bag waste once every three weeks instead of every fortnight. This should also help boost recycling rates.
- Restricting opening times of Hubs and libraries and using more volunteers to help run the service - but not closing any library in full.
- Increasing residential and pay and display parking charges.
- Increasing the cost of hiring sports pitches.
- Increasing the price of the burials and cremation service.
- Changing the ways parks are managed, including reducing the maintenance on sections of parks and green spaces, reducing the number of floral displays and re-wilding some planting areas.
- Increasing the cost of school meals, although we will continue to subsidise this service.

The online version of the budget consultation can be accessed at: www.cardiff.gov.uk/budget and is available in five different languages, including English, Welsh, Arabic, Polish and Bengali. Printed copies of the budget consultation in multiple languages are also available in Hubs, libraries and council buildings across the city.

I urge members to share the budget consultation in their communities and to encourage residents across the city to share their views.

Unfortunately, shortly after the consultation commenced, a minor discrepancy was identified between the online and printed versions of the consultation questions that was the result of an error during the design and print process. I can confirm that this has since been rectified and all uncompleted hard copies of the budget consultation have been replaced with a version that includes the correct question wording. It's important to note that no budget saving is being proposed at this time in relation to the specific question where there was found to be a discrepancy (i.e. within the Parks section in relation to Bute Park Nursery, its Visitor Centre and Roath Park Conservatory).

CardiffGov Mobile App

At the end of December 2023, the CardiffGov mobile app hit 88,055 downloads since its launch. The number of downloads decreased slightly in comparison with recent months, with 1,459 downloads last month.

The number of people accessing our services are split by the type of device they use (iOS and Android). There were 889 downloads of the CardiffGov mobile app to iOS devices in December 2023. The CardiffGov mobile app was also opened 19,229 times by iOS devices. In addition, 570 Android users downloaded the CardiffGov mobile app to their device in December 2023. There were also 12,094 active Android users last month, which was a 1.3% decrease from the previous month.

Website

Key statistics from December 2023 in relation to the Council's website:

- 267,000 people visited www.cardiff.gov.uk viewing 501,000 pages, with 79.4% of visitors using a mobile device, which is the highest percentage to date.
- 26,900 online payments received totalling £3.1million.
- 320,000 residents checked their waste collections online, which was an increase of 52,000 from November 2023.
- 99.9% (14,800) of recycling centre bookings and 94% (5,000) of bulky item collections were made online.
- 6,500 A-Z of Recycling and Waste lookups were made with 'wrapping paper' and 'Christmas trees' being most searched for.
- 92% of problem parking reports (819) were made online, along with 81.4% of street lighting reports (114).
- 4,600 online forms were submitted.

Customers accessed their Council Tax account 19,300 times via the website and app. www.cardiff.gov.uk scored 99% in the January audit by SOCITM's accessibility partner Silktide, which puts the website in joint first place in Wales and 18th in the UK for accessibility compliance (over 375 websites reviewed).

Chatbot (BOBi)

There was a total of 4,729 conversations in December 2023, with just 510 resulting in handoff to agents. Feedback was provided by 332 people who spoke to the chatbot, with 83% of feedback was rated as Ok, Good or Very Good, with Very Good being the highest percentage of these ratings (52%). Chatbot users mostly engaged with our waste options, Council Tax and parking scenarios, with most interactions relating specifically to the waste collection calendar and Council Tax & benefits information.

Since the last update to BOBi, the team has finished making changes to the address search for multiple scenarios, including fly-tipping, problem parking, graffiti, waste collections calendar, HWRC booking and others. The next services in scope to be developed on BOBi include information on Planning and improvements to the 'Do Not Understand' options and messages, where BOBi will give extra options to users in order to try tackle their queries directly, rather than handing off to an agent. Work will also take place to link BOBi to services already on the CardiffGov mobile app and website by displaying service information directly on the chatbot or linking to the website. Examples of these services include highways defects, cleansing and street lighting.

Connect to Cardiff

December is historically a quieter month on traditional channels; however, Connect to Cardiff assisted citizens by dealing with:

- 16,373 phone calls – Council Tax and Housing Repairs had the highest demand respectively;
- 5,416 webforms – average answer time of 11.6 hours against a targeted turnaround of 48 hours; and
- 1,604 webchats (live one-to-one chat session).

Social Media

A total of 5,064 messages were received across a range of platforms, including Facebook and X as the two mostly highly utilised platforms. C2C actioned 3,796 messages and replied directly to 421 of these. Each contact received is assigned a 'tag' by a C2C operative for data intelligence purposes to understand what is driving citizens to contact us via socials. The number one tag last month was for residents checking Christmas waste collection arrangements.

Councillor Chris Weaver
Cabinet Member for Finance, Modernisation & Performance
19 January 2024