



REGENERATION AND ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, YSTRAD MYNACH ON WEDNESDAY, 30TH JULY 2014 AT 5.30 P.M.

PRESENT:

Councillor D.T. Davies - Chair
Councillor Mrs E.M. Aldworth - Vice-Chair

Councillors:

J. Bevan, Mrs A. Blackman, C.J. Cuss, R.T. Davies, N. Dix, C. Elsbury, R.W. Gough, Ms J.G. Jones, S. Kent, M. Prew, Mrs D. Price, A. Rees and Mrs E. Stenner.

Cabinet Members:

K. James (Regeneration, Planning and Sustainable Development), D. Poole (Community and Leisure Service) and T.J. Williams (Highways, Transportation and Engineering).

Together with:

S. Aspinall (Acting Deputy Chief Executive), M.S. Williams (Head of Community & Leisure Services), D. Phenis (Sport and Leisure Services Manager), D. Price (Parks and outdoor facilities manager), C. Forbes-Thompson (Scrutiny Research Officer) and C. Evans (Committee Services Officer)

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor P. Leonard.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor E. Stenner declared an Interest in Agenda Item 3(1) Appendix 1, Waste Strategy Operations as a family member is employed in this area.

Councillors Mrs E. Aldworth, J. Bevan, R. Gough and Mrs J. Jones declared an interest in Agenda Item 3(1) Appendix 1, Waste Strategy Operations due to their use of Civic Amenity Sites within the Borough.

Councillors Mrs E. Aldworth, D.T. Davies, S. Kent, M. Prew and Mrs D. Price declared an interest in Agenda Item 3(1) Appendix 2, Sport and Leisure due to their use of Leisure Centres/ Facilities within the Borough.

Councillors J. Bevan, Mrs A. Blackman, D.T. Davies, R. Gough, M. Prew, Mrs D. Price and Mrs E. Stenner declared an interest in Agenda Item 3(1), Appendix 3, Parks, Bereavements and Outdoor Facilities due to owning Cemetery plots within the Borough.

Councillors Mrs E. Aldworth, J. Bevan, Mrs A. Blackman, D.T. Davies, R.T. Davies, C. Elsbury, S. Kent, Mrs D. Price and Mrs E. Stenner declared an interest as Community Councillors.

Councillor D.T Davies declared an interest declared an interest in Agenda Item 3(1) Appendix 1, Bowling Clubs as President of Bargoed Bowls Club.

Members were advised that as no decision was being made there was no requirement for Member to leave the meeting room and were able to fully take part in the debate.

REPORTS OF OFFICERS

Consideration was given to the following reports.

3. COMMUNITY AND LEISURE SERVICES DIVISION MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN 2015/16 AND 2016/17- ITEMS FOR CONSIDERATION

M.S. Williams, Head of Community & Leisure Services, provided Members with considerations for the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) contributions from the Community and Leisure Services Division in accordance with the Cabinet Report of 16th April 2014 (“Next Stages of the MTFP – 2015/16 & 2016/17”).

Members were asked to consider the Community and Leisure Services Division’s contribution to assisting the Authority to meet its obligations in respect of the 2014-17 Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP), taking due note that:-

- i) The Council’s MTFP requires estimated savings of £6.5m for the 2015/16 financial year and £6.9m for 2016/17.
- ii) Discretionary Services are reviewed in full, including those areas of statutory provision where delivery exceeds the minimum required levels, with a view to identifying savings proposals totalling over £8m across the Authority
- iii) Further proposals for Members to consider in respect of up to 3% efficiency savings. These efficiency savings targets to be applied to those statutory and essential services that the Authority has to deliver, either directly or via a third party organisation.

The division operates a mix of statutory (e.g. waste services) and discretionary services (e.g. Sport and Leisure, Parks) with some other services (e.g. street cleansing) having a statutory basis with discretion over service delivery.

The Chair thanked the Officer for the introduction and the Committee agreed that, as per the report, which subdivided the 5 distinct services and identified suggested savings for each, the Scrutiny Committee would consider each area and proposal in turn.

5.2.1 Waste Strategy and Operations Service (Appendix 1)

Waste Strategy and Operations Service provides a mix of statutory and discretionary services including collection, treatment and disposal of wastes and recyclables, street cleaning, civic amenity sites and public conveniences

Closure of Civic Amenity Sites- Various options from closing 1 site to closing 5 sites

The report demonstrated the various savings options available through the closure of each site. Members noted that the Civic Amenity Sites are mainly discretionary Services, as statutory requirement provides for only 1 site within the Borough.

Members raised concerns about the possible increase in Fly Tipping, demonstrating a considerable increase noticed on the day of the strike. Members queried whether private skips could be provided in villages or towns, if a site were to be closed. Officers confirmed that the Authority, by law, has a Duty of Care, which would not be met. It was added that there would also be risks in the disposal of hazardous waste.

Members requested further information on the tonnage and number of cars disposing of waste at each of the sites and queried the impact to other sites and on Fly Tipping if a site were to be closed. The Officer confirmed that data could be provided, and highlighted that it is not an intention at this stage to close all or any sites, purely to offer Members a variety of options for consideration.

Members queried the progress of the Ty Dyffryn site. Members noted the closure of Trehir and Penallta and the replacement of a new facility at Ty Dyffryn is the subject of a business case, and potential savings of circa £110,000.

Members queried the policy on charging the public for the disposal of waste. It was noted that Cabinet had earlier endorsed a recommendation from a report, which provided for vans and trailers to be charged for the disposal of domestic waste.

Members raised concerns about the impact on performance and targets if any recommendation or closure were to come into force. Officers stated that Caerphilly is currently one of the top performers in Wales, however there is room for improvement. Targets are becoming more difficult to meet and there would be more costs involved in order to meet the requirements. Prosiect Gwyrdd could provide additional recycling options, however it was identified that further work is needed to find a solution to separating street litter in order to recycle, but a solution is not currently available.

Members felt unable to support this option in its current form and asked for options to be explored which involved reducing opening hours or closing for specific days across all sites. Concerns were raised that there would be an increase in Fly Tipping and Members requested further information on the cost implications of fly tipping and the number of incidents per annum.

Closure of Public Conveniences- Various options from closing 1 facility to closing all 6.

The report demonstrated the various savings options available through the closure of each site within the borough. Members noted that the Public Conveniences are discretionary Services.

Members sought further information on the funding provided by Welsh Government (WG) to local businesses in areas in which public conveniences had been removed. Officers confirmed that the WG funding was withdrawn in March 2014 and provided to CCBC as part of the Revenue Support Grant (RSG), however, clarification is pending on the amount received. Members noted that Cabinet considered a report in May to pay the grant to those properties in receipt of payment last year; however, no decision has been made to consider further payments in the future.

A Member queried those Public conveniences closed, whether they had been sold and if there was a payment of NNDR. Officers confirmed that the majority of properties had been demolished and were not paying NNDR.

Members felt that the options could not be supported without first consulting with Community Council's, Trade Unions and local companies in order to explore all avenues and funding options.

Councillor C. Cuss requested further information on the Public Conveniences that have been part of/ subject to Regeneration Funding.

Councillor A. Rees requested a detailed report on the breakdown of costs to run a public convenience.

Street Cleansing

(i) Reduced Cleansing on bank holidays

The report demonstrated the savings available through the reduction of street cleansing and the options to reduce cleansing on bank holidays. Members noted that street cleansing is part statutory and part discretionary service.

Members felt that there would be a minimal impact to the service delivery and cleanliness of the Borough and as a result supported the proposal.

(ii) Reduction in number of pedestrian sweepers operated (reducing by 1)

The report demonstrated the savings available through the reduction of cleaning on a year-by-year basis. Members noted that the street cleansing is a statutory service.

Members highlighted that cleansing within the Borough is better than in other areas and were unhappy to see a change in this.

The report suggested an early morning presence in Villages and Town Centres, (as opposed to an all day presence) with the result that each would only receive an early morning clean and not cleansing throughout the day.

A Member suggested that consideration be given to a seasonal cleaning regime. It was noted however, that this would reduce the saving by 50% if this were to be implemented on a seasonal basis.

Members supported the proposal within the report.

(iii) Reduction in weed removal budget and service.

The report highlighted the potential saving of £100k if the weed removal budget were reduced. Members noted that this reduction would provide an annual visit to each ward in the Borough, as opposed to 2 visits per year for weed treatment and removal.

Members discussed this proposal and raised concerns that weeds have been a significant issue in recent months due to the weather. It was observed that residents are not as proactive in the removal of weeds and debris from around their properties and as a result, Members raised concerns about the damage caused to highway and property infrastructure.

A Member queried the cost of the Weed Killer used and its effectiveness. Officers stated that the products used cost circa £70Kk to supply and spray onto the highway network. Members were asked to note that there are strict requirements placed on Local Authorities in terms of products, which are enforced by Natural Resources Wales.

Members considered and discussed the proposal in detail and supported this proposal.

Waste Collection

(i) Charging for all replacement containers

The report demonstrated the savings amounts if the Authority were to charge to replace all waste containers. Currently, only general waste containers incur a charge for replacing, unless they are stolen.

Members noted that refuse and recycling collection services are a statutory duty, however the supply of the containers is not. Local Authorities have the legal powers to specify the type of containers the waste is collected from.

Members discussed the proposal in depth and raised concerns about the proposal and the possible impact this could have on the Performance Data.

Members queried the cost to the public for each container. Officers explained that they are currently £25 for a new wheeled bin, which includes delivery but that there would obviously be lower charges for bags and food caddies.

Members suggested that Cabinet consider the proposal further.

(ii) Integration of Farm/ Rural collections onto One Vehicle

The report demonstrated the savings proposed if Farm/ Rural collections were integrated into one vehicle. Members noted that the proposal would require a split cage vehicle.

Members sought further information on the staffing implications to the proposal. Officers stated that they would be redeployed or cross-matched into alternative posts where possible.

Members supported this proposal

Waste Treatment and Disposal- Project Gwyrdd

The report provided details of the £1,200,000 saving, which was originally considered to be part of the savings that would arise once the full Prosiect Gwyrdd Service had commenced in 2016/17. However, due to interim contract provisions, can be brought forward to 2015/16.

Members were asked to note that if this saving can not be considered as part of the Community and Leisure Services MTFP then there are no further savings that can be made from this budget heading.

Members noted that Prosiect Gwyrdd is currently under development and due to open shortly. Members supported this proposal

5.2.2 Sport and Leisure

The Sport and Leisure Service is entirely discretionary although the service makes a significant contribution to the healthy lifestyle agenda and addressing obesity and inactivity across the County Borough in accordance with one of the Authority's improvement objectives.

Year 2 Saving from Caerphilly Leisure Centre Cafeteria

Members noted that Cabinet supported this proposal in 2013/14 and noted the Year 2 savings from Caerphilly Leisure Centre cafeteria closure.

Closure Cwmcarn as a Leisure Centre

Members noted that the Leisure Centre had not opened to the public since the issues were identified and supported the option not to reopen it as a leisure centre.

Reduction Cleaning Contract

The proposal to reduce the cleaning hours at all Leisure Centres would alter Terms and Conditions of contracts and there would be a potential redundancy in order to meet the £30,000 savings amount in 2015/16.

Members supported the proposal and suggested consultation with the Building Cleaning Service staff and Trade Unions.

Leisure Centre Closures

The Report detailed individual costs to the closure of each of the Leisure Centres in the Borough. Leisure Centres are a discretionary Service and Members noted that the closure of any Leisure Centre would result in up-front costs, therefore savings cannot be realised until 2016/17.

Members were asked to consider the Leisure Strategy, which had been sent to all Members for consideration and consultation. Members were urged to consider the proposals outlined within the report, alongside the Leisure Strategy, which would be considered at the next Scrutiny Committee in September.

Members expressed concerns that there was a conflict between the proposals and Improvement Objective 4, which was considered at the last meeting. Members noted that a Leisure Centre Strategy has been sent to all members of the Committee for their consultation, which outlined proposals to combat some of the concerns raised and look to make savings in Leisure Centres.

Members felt unable to support the proposals at the present time and suggested waiting until September for a more detailed report on the options, following the consultation on the Leisure Strategy and Business Plan.

5.2.3- Parks, Bereavements and Outdoor Facilities

The Parks, Bereavements and Outdoor Facilities Services is mainly discretionary although there are statutory elements such as grass cutting to maintain highway safety, play provision and maintenance of existing cemeteries.

Phase 2 of removal of flowerbeds in Parks and Open locations (Phase 1 was completed in 2014/15)

The report highlighted the potential savings of £40,000 for 2015/16. Members noted that phase 1 was completed in 2014/15 and Local Ward Members and Town and Community Councils would be consulted prior to works being conducted.

Following discussion and consideration, Members supported this proposal.

Removal of hanging baskets from town centres

The report highlighted that the provision of hanging baskets in town centres was a discretionary service and the removal of the service would provide a saving amount of £34,000 in 2015/16.

Members discussed this service and raised concerns about future entry into Britain in Bloom and the impact to the bee population. Members noted that the significant costs comes from the upkeep of the baskets, in particular the watering.

Members felt that the options could not be supported without first consulting with Town and Community Council's in order to explore all avenues and funding options. The Head of Service outlined the decision deadline for ordering plants as the end of October 2014.

Reduction in playing field maintenance to remove 2 fertilizer applications and cease end of season renovation works.

The report highlighted that there was a potential £30,000 saving amount to be made by reducing the discretionary service.

Members sought clarification on the reductions and it was highlighted that the renovations at the end of the season to maintain pitches would cease, as would all maintenance works at the end of the sports season.

Members felt that the options could not be supported without first consulting with Local Clubs and Town and Community Council's in order to explore all avenues and funding options

Increasing Outdoor Sports Facilities Charges by 20%

The report presented Members with a potential saving amount of £20,000 in 2015/16 and £20,000 in 2016/17 by increasing the Outdoor Sports Facilities charges by 20%.

Members discussed this proposal and raised significant concerns about the impact this would have on the users of the facilities and in particular on the young people of the Borough. Officers highlighted that Caerphilly are charging some of the lower prices for the use of these facilities.

Members suggested amending the proposal to further increase fees for adult activities beyond the percentage suggested and consider further options for freezing charges for junior users.

Review of Park Ranger Service to reduce from 18 to 6 Rangers over a 2 year period.

Members noted that the reduction in the discretionary Park Ranger Services would provide a savings of £40,000 in 2015/16 and an additional £40,000 in 2016/17.

Members discussed the proposal and sought further information on the staffing. Officers highlighted that 6 of the staff would not be subject to redundancy as they are employed through agency, however 6 are employed by the Authority and would be subject to redundancy or redeployment.

Further clarification was sought on the role of Park Rangers, in particular in relation to those responsible for sports pitches. Officers explained that Park Rangers are seasonal appointments that would deal with season tickets, management of outdoor sports facilities and general tidiness of the park. Members also noted that a Policy is in place and enforced that specifies that pitch cleanliness is the responsibility of the Clubs using the facilities.

Subject to consultation with staff, Trade Unions and Town and Community Councils, Members were happy to support this proposal.

Closure of 6 of the Authority's 21 Bowling Greens at Penyrheol, Oakdale and New Tredegar (in 2015/16) followed by Machen, Senghenydd and Ynysddu (in 2016/17)

Councillor D.T. Davies declared an interest as President of Bargoed Bowls Club, however, as this was not a proposal within the report, he remained and fully participated in the discussion.

The report referred to a proposal to close 3 of the Authority's Bowling Green in 2015/16, and a further 3 in 2016/17, which would provide a £50,000 saving amount in these 2 financial years.

Members queried the selection process for the proposed closures. Officers confirmed that the Bowling Greens were selected due to the number of season tickets purchased, the Greens with the lowest number of season tickets purchased were considered for efficiency savings.

Following detailed consideration and debate, Members felt that they were unable to support this proposal and suggested that all bowls clubs in the Borough be contacted and offered the management of the green and bring back to Committee for consideration.

Retirement of Principal Parks Operations Officer

The report referred to the retirement of the Principal Parks Operations Officer, which would provide a savings amount of £50,000 in 2016/17. Members noted that there would be a requirement to conduct a restructure of the service to ensure that service delivery is still effective and staff and Trade Unions are consulted with.

Members supported the proposal on the pretence that a restructure be conducted to ensure sufficient staffing in areas.

Reduction in Playground budget

The Report referred to the statutory service to provide playgrounds throughout the Borough. Members noted that the proposed saving for £8,000 in 2015/16 had been allocated from the repairs and maintenance budget.

Members discussed the proposal and raised concerns around maintaining safety of the parks and playgrounds. Members were assured that there would be no compromise on playground safety and that the playgrounds are subjected to annual inspections, the Authority has a responsibility to record and maintain records of the inspections for a 20 year period.

Members supported this proposal

5.2.4- Building Cleaning

The Building Cleaning Service provides a range of “soft” facilities management services (such as internal cleaning, window and canopy cleaning, PAT testing, etc) to schools and other public buildings as well as a small number of external customers. The Service is discretionary although the Authority has a legal duty to keep its buildings in a clean and safe condition.

Retirement of Service Manager

The report referred to the retirement of the Service Manager of Building Cleaning Service, which would provide a savings amount of £50,000 in 2016/17. Members noted that there would be a requirement to conduct a restructure of the service to ensure that service delivery is still effective and staff and Trade Unions are consulted with.

Members supported the proposal on the pretence that a restructure be conducted to ensure sufficient staffing in areas.

5.2.5- Fleet Management and Maintenance

The Fleet Management and Maintenance Service has 2 main elements- ensuring legal compliance with road traffic law and maintenance of the Council’s fleet of vehicles in a safe and roadworthy condition. These elements are essentially statutory. In addition the Authority’s fuel stocks and vehicle hires are managed by the service. These are discretionary elements of the service.

Retirement of Service Manager

The report referred to the retirement of the Service Manager of Fleet Management and Maintenance Service, which would provide a savings amount of £50,000 in 2016/17. Members noted that there would be a requirement to conduct a restructure of the service to ensure that service delivery is still effective and staff and Trade Unions are consulted with.

Members supported the proposal on the pretence that a restructure be conducted to ensure sufficient staffing in areas.

Councillor S. Kent requested further information on staff levels within Community and Leisure Services from 2008 to date. It was agreed that Officers would email the Committee with the information.

The meeting closed at 20.27 p.m.

Approved as a correct record and subject to any amendments or corrections agreed and recorded in the minutes of the meeting held on 3rd September 2014 they were signed by the Chair.

CHAIR