



POLICY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, YSTRAD MYNACH
ON TUESDAY, 29TH SEPTEMBER 2009 AT 5.15 PM**

PRESENT:

Councillor J. Taylor - Chairman
Councillor Mrs. M.E. Sargent - Vice Chairman

Councillors

L. Binding, D. Bolter, J.B. Criddle, J.E. Fussell, Ms. L. Hughes, Mrs. V. Jenkins, S. Jenkins,
G. Jones, K. Lloyd, K.V. Reynolds, A.S. Williams, J.M. Wilson

Also present:

Cabinet Members Councillors A.J. Pritchard and C.P. Mann

Together with:

N. Barnett (Director of Corporate Services), P. Evans (Head of Information, Communications, Technology and Property Services), C. Jones (Head of Performance and Policy), L. Lucas (Head of Procurement), D. Perkins (Head of Legal Services), N. Scammell (Head of Corporate Finance), D.A. Thomas (Policy Officer - Welsh Language), A. Morgan (Group Accountant), R. Hopkins (Principal Housing and Council Tax Benefits Officer), J. Jones (Scrutiny Co-ordinator) and G. George (Committee Services Manager)

APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors H.A. Andrews, Mrs. A. Blackman, D.T. Davies, K. Etheridge, D.V. Poole and T.J. Williams.

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made at the beginning or during the course of the meeting.

2. MINUTES - 21ST JULY 2009

RESOLVED that, subject to it being noted that Councillor K. Lloyd was not a member of Hafodyrynys Community Centre but had been present at a meeting when the application was being discussed, the minutes of the last meeting held on 21st July 2009 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

3. CONSIDERATION OF ANY MATTER REFERRED TO THIS COMMITTEE IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE CALL-IN PROCEDURE

No matters had been referred to the Scrutiny Committee in accordance with the call-in procedure.

4. REPORT BY CABINET MEMBER

Cabinet members C.P. Mann and A.J. Pritchard were present and reported orally on recent developments regarding pay awards. They also reported that the Council had received a positive report from the Auditors, Price Waterhouse Coopers, on the budget process and closing the accounts.

The Council will be accepting £109k of WAG grant to help pensioners pay their Council Tax. Guidelines were still being considered but payment was likely to be based on those who already received partial Council Tax benefit instead of reducing specific grants. Reference was made to a recent television programme on issues within the public sector and the conclusion that the UK was staring at a huge financial black hole.

Members were reminded of the wider financial situation in the context of the council's own budget setting process. The Budget Advisory Group was continuing to meet and there would be a meeting with Trade Union representatives on the 8th October 2009. There were still vacancies on the Group.

Budget Advisory Group members still needed to decide on the budget process to take place between now and the setting of the Council tax. Seminars and scrutiny committees had both been arranged and member's comments were asked for their preferences on the process to be followed.

5. CABINET REPORTS

None of the Cabinet reports listed on the agenda had been requested to be brought forward for review at the meeting.

SCRUTINY REPORTS

Consideration was given to the following Scrutiny reports.

6. REVIEW OF BROAD RENTAL MARKET AREAS

The report advised members of the possible impact of the Rent Service Review of Broad Rental Market Areas within Caerphilly County Borough Council, undertaken by Welsh Assembly Government.

In April 2008 the Government introduced a new housing benefit scheme for certain private sector tenants called the Local Housing Allowance or LHA scheme. The scheme worked by reference to sets of fixed rental amounts for different areas within Caerphilly CBC, and these rental values were used as the starting point in the determination of housing benefit claims. Although LHA was a new scheme, it was still housing benefit and hence it was still means tested.

Members noted the proposed changes and were asked to respond within the consultation period that ended on 22 November 2009.

Members agreed to invite representatives of the Rent Service to the next meeting and pending discussions at that meeting and in the light of further information on transitional arrangements and comparisons with a comparable neighbouring local authority then to consider whether to appeal against these proposals.

7. BUDGET STRATEGY VACANCY MANAGEMENT

Members noted the up-to-date position on the vacancy management strategy being adopted in accordance with the 2009/10 budget strategy approved by Council in March 2009. Vacancy management was not only about deleting posts but also about delaying the filling of posts and restructuring and rationalising structures. Together, these strategies had been aimed at, and proved successful to date, in avoiding the need for compulsory redundancies. Discussions with trade unions on a number of personnel related issues were ongoing.

Members noted the report on budget strategy vacancy management.

8. REVENUE GRANT BUDGET REPORT - CORPORATE SERVICES AND PERFORMANCE/POLICY

Members considered the report on grant funding included within the 2009/10 budgets for Corporate Services and Performance & Policy. The report covered revenue grant funding notified to the authority to date, by external funding bodies, for 2009/10, for the service areas concerned. It excluded grant-funded schemes where the council acted as bankers for Partnership schemes. Further grant awards may be received during the course of the year.

Members noted the contents of the report.

9. BUDGET MONITORING 2009/2010 - PERFORMANCE AND POLICY

The report projected the anticipated final outturn for these services based upon expenditure and income trends for the first three months of the year. The report highlighted any variances from the original estimates and tables showing the variances for each of the services were included as appendices.

Members noted the contents of the report and asked for a report, either to this committee or if deemed appropriate to Council, on the savings made by not taking the increases in members allowances and how they could be redistributed to other ends.

10. BUDGET MONITORING 2009/2010 - CORPORATE SERVICES AND MISCELLANEOUS FINANCE

The report projected the anticipated final outturn for these services based upon expenditure and income trends for the first three months of the year. The report highlighted any significant variances from the original estimates and showing the variances for each of the services.

Members noted the contents of the report.

11. TREASURY MANAGEMENT AND CAPITAL FINANCING PRUDENTIAL INDICATORS MONITORING REPORT – 1ST QUARTER 2009/10

Members considered details of Treasury Management activities and Capital Financing, together with related Prudential Indicators for the period 1st April 2009 to 31st July 2009. The

report reviewed the Treasury Management Strategy for 2009/2010 as set out in the Annual Investment Strategy and Capital Financing Prudential Indicators Report.

Members noted the report and were updated on the potential recoverability of amounts from Icelandic banks that had become available. The Councils external auditors, PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP had confirmed in their report to the Audit Committee on 23rd September 2009 that the authority had updated the final set of financial statements for 2008/09 to ensure that they reflected the latest available information and that a provision had been set aside for any potential losses on Icelandic investments.

Arising from the report members requested a further report on options for the provision of treasury management advice before considering any extension to the existing provider.

12. INFORMATION ON WELSH LANGUAGE COSTS FOR CAERPHILLY COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

Members considered the report which detailed the cost of aspects of implementing the Welsh Language Scheme for the Authority. It covered staff costs, training and translation of public material but excluded Welsh medium education costs.

Members noted the contents of the report.

13. INFORMATION ITEMS

Members received and noted the following information items:

1. Corporate Health and Safety Committee - minutes of the meetings held on 13th May 2009 and 12th August 2009;
2. Local Service Board - minutes of meeting held on 21st July 2009;
3. Pensions/Compensation Committee meeting held on 16th September 2009;
4. Members Allowances and Expenses 2008/2009;
5. ICT Benchmarking User Satisfaction;
6. Rhymney Public Realm Works Contract – Overspend.

14. REQUESTS FOR AN ITEM TO BE INCLUDED ON THE NEXT AVAILABLE AGENDA

Members requested a report on the following item for the next meeting of this committee and/or the Living Environment Scrutiny Committee.

1. The Councils policy of charging for burial of cremated remains of still born infants up to thirteen years and how many have taken place in the county borough this year (Councillor S Jenkins)

Approved as a correct record, and subject to any amendments or corrections agreed and recorded in the minutes of the meeting held on 10th November 2009, they were signed by the Chairman.

The meeting closed at 7.23 pm.

CHAIRMAN