



REGENERATION AND ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, YSTRAD MYNACH ON MONDAY, 20TH JANUARY 2014 AT 5.30 P.M.

PRESENT:

Councillor D.T. Davies – Chairman
Councillor Mrs E.M. Aldworth – Vice Chairman

Councillors:

J. Bevan, C.J. Cuss, C. Elsbury, Ms E. Forehead, R.W. Gough, A.G. Higgs, Ms J.G. Jones, S. Kent, M.J. Prew, Mrs D. Price and Mrs E. Stenner.

Cabinet Members:

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

Together with:

S. Aspinall (Acting Deputy Chief Executive), P. Elliott (Head of Regeneration and Planning), R. Hartshorn (Head of Public Protection), T. Shaw (Head of Engineering Services), M.S. Williams (Head of Community and Leisure Services), G. Williams (Monitoring Officer and Principal Solicitor), J. Jones (Democratic Services Manager), and R. Barrett (Committee Services Officer).

Also present:

Councillors J.A. Pritchard and J. Taylor.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors Mrs A. Blackman, R.T. Davies and N. Dix.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor D.T. Davies declared an interest in item 4(1) – Local Government Settlement 2014/15 – Environment Directorate Savings Proposals. Details are minuted with the respective item.

During the course of the meeting, Councillors J. Bevan and Mrs D. Price declared an interest in an item under discussion. Details are minuted with the respective item.

Councillor J.A. Pritchard attended the meeting to speak on the report and declared an interest in an item under discussion. Details are minuted with the respective item.

3. MINUTES – 12TH DECEMBER 2013

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 12th December 2013 (minute nos. 1 - 3, page nos. 1 - 6) be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

REPORTS OF OFFICERS

Consideration was given to the following.

4. LOCAL GOVERNMENT SETTLEMENT 2014/15 – ENVIRONMENT DIRECTORATE SAVINGS PROPOSALS

Sandra Aspinall, Acting Deputy Chief Executive, introduced the report to Members and summarised the situation to date. At a meeting of the Regeneration and Environment Scrutiny Committee on 10th December 2013, during which potential savings proposals for the Directorate of the Environment 2014/15 were presented by each of the Heads of Service, Members expressed a wish to consider a number of the items in greater detail at a future meeting early in 2014. The purpose of the latest meeting and report was therefore to allow further scrutiny of these proposals. It was emphasised to Members that the process was still at the consultation stage, with a meeting with the trade unions scheduled for 28th January 2014, and thus there would be no definitive decisions taken as yet.

Councillor D.T. Davies declared an interest in the proposal suggesting the ceasing of management grants to bowls clubs and splash pools within the Authority, as he is a member of Bargoed Bowls Club. It was determined that his interest could be viewed as prejudicial and Councillor Davies was therefore advised to leave the meeting during discussion of this item.

It was determined that this proposal would be discussed first to allow Councillor Davies to participate in the rest of the meeting, and Councillor Davies left the room during discussion of this item. Councillor Mrs E.A. Aldworth presided as Chair during consideration of this item.

Mark S. Williams, Head of Community and Leisure Services, presented further information relating to suggested savings for 2014/15 for his Service Area, and an amended copy of the presentation was tabled at the meeting.

The first element of suggested savings related to the proposal to cease provision of management grants to four bowls clubs (Bedwas and Trethomas, Gilfach, Machen and Bargoed) and the Senghennydd Splash Pad. This would bring about a projected saving of £12,429, which was above the Medium Term Financial Plan target of £10,000 for 2014/15.

It was explained that the grants to bowls clubs were historical agreements established by predecessor authorities and that the amount of grant varied between each bowls club. Members were advised that Senghennydd Splash Pad had been installed against the advice of Officers several years ago, based on the Authority's experience of operating a splash pool at Morgan Jones Park. The original projected business plan for the Senghennydd Splash Pad had indicated a requirement of £2000 per annum but this soon grew to £6000 per annum. The Head of Service advised that there was an arrangement with ice-cream vendors in relation to Morgan Jones Park, and this could be a future potential source of funding for the Senghennydd Splash Pad, should interested parties wish to investigate this further. He also suggested that the Senghennydd Community Partnership could hire the facility for parties.

The savings proposals in relation to the management grants included removing the grants altogether, reducing the grants and introducing equal treatment for all the bowls clubs and Splash Pad, or achieving £10,000 saving in 2014/15 by reducing the grant from £12,429 to £2429, and then phasing out the grants altogether in 2015/16.

Discussion ensued in relation to the bowls clubs before Councillor J. Taylor was invited to speak on behalf of the Aber Valley Partnership in relation to the proposal to cease the provision of a management grant to the Senghenydd Splash Pad. Councillor Taylor informed those present that he had received advice from the Monitoring Officer and as a result would be leaving the meeting following his presentation.

Councillor Taylor addressed the Scrutiny Committee, stating that he was disappointed in the claim that the Senghenydd Splash Pad was installed against Officer advice and felt that the report was therefore misleading. He referred to the funding origins of the project, stating that it was developed via a community partnership with CCBC and other organisations and that the project was established with a view to replace an existing paddling pool.

Councillor Taylor offered the minutes of the meetings of the Aber Valley Partnership to evidence the details behind the partnership, and stated that he did not think the suggestions to utilise an ice-cream vendor or to hire out the facility would be viable. Councillor Taylor stated that the Splash Pad was one of the few facilities available in the area for young children and appealed to the Scrutiny Committee to take these considerations into account.

Councillor Taylor was thanked for his presentation and he left the meeting.

Members queried the details of the funding agreement between the Council and the community partnership. Officers confirmed that this was originally the remit of the former Education and Leisure department back in 2006 and that funding agreements and departmental responsibility for the Splash Pad had subsequently changed over the resulting years. The Acting Deputy Chief Executive stated that the partnership had been given a grant of £2,000 but the Head of Service at that time withdrew the grant. The grant was reinstated and it was agreed that for the year 2011-2012, a grant of £6,000 would be provided. However, this would be on the receipt of detailed information relating to the expenditure incurred.

Following detailed consideration and discussion of a number of possible options, the Scrutiny Committee, by a show of hands, RECOMMENDED to Cabinet that the Senghenydd Splash Pad proposal be withdrawn from the list of suggested savings pending a review of its funding by Officers, and that the £2429 surplus medium term financial plan (MTFP) saving be divided between the four bowls clubs for 2014/15.

Councillor D.T. Davies returned to the meeting and resumed his position as Chair.

The next element of suggested savings detailed the proposed introduction of charges for garden waste collection. This measure had already been introduced in a number of other Authorities and the charge would bring about a projected saving of £80,000 per annum, although this figure could be higher or lower. The Head of Service acknowledged that the scheme would be difficult to administer and that the success of the system was dependant on socio-economics within the area.

The Scrutiny Committee discussed the proposal and, by a show of hands, unanimously RECOMMENDED to Cabinet that the proposal to introduce charges for garden waste collection be withdrawn from the list of suggested savings.

The next element of suggested savings related to the introduction of double shift working for mechanical sweepers, which would bring about a projected saving of £73,000. It was confirmed that this proposal would be subject to a period of consultation with trade unions. The Head of Service explained that double shift working was a pattern of working currently

utilised by the Authority's road sweepers, and consisted of three consecutive working days per week of 12.5 hours each day, within daytime hours.

The Scrutiny Committee discussed the proposal and, by a show of hands, unanimously RECOMMENDED to Cabinet that the savings proposal to introduce double shift working be supported.

The next element of suggested savings related to the suggested closure of some/all of the public conveniences in the Authority. Members were reminded of the location of the 9 public conveniences within the Authority, these being Bargoed, Ystrad Mynach, Nelson, Caerphilly Tourist Information Centre, Caerphilly Bus Station, Blackwood Bus Station, Fleur de Lys, Newbridge and Risca. The Head of Service explained that the potential savings ranged between £24,000 (if Nelson, Newbridge and Fleur de Lys public conveniences were closed) and £119,000 (if all 9 conveniences were closed). Members were informed that if Caerphilly Tourist Information Centre public convenience were to remain open, there would be a need to redesign the facilities in order to alter disabled access and reduce current anti-social behaviour. The savings proposals included closing all 9 public conveniences, closing Nelson, Newbridge and Fleur de Lys public conveniences, or choosing to close a different amount and retaining the ones in the major town centres.

Members queried arrangements relating to the Public Convenience Grant Scheme, which encourages local businesses to make their toilet facilities available for free public use, and clarified current staffing arrangements regarding the cleaning of the public conveniences. The Head of Service clarified that Nelson, Newbridge and Fleur de Lys public conveniences had been identified as potential sites for closure due to their location within a smaller town or village location. Members recognised the importance of public conveniences within town centre but acknowledged that savings had to be made. The Head of Service clarified that enquiries would be made in regards to selling the buildings if the public conveniences were closed.

The Scrutiny Committee discussed the proposal and, by a show of hands, unanimously RECOMMENDED to Cabinet that the suggested savings option to close three public conveniences, namely Nelson, Newbridge and Fleur de Lys, be approved.

The next element of suggested savings related to the proposal to charge for all replacement and new issue household waste containers. This would bring about a projected saving of £63,000. Members were reminded of the current policy allowing for the free replacement of recycling and residual bins. There would be some work required to the Authority's computer systems in order to implement the charge, and proposed charges included £25 per bin, £5 per food caddy, £2 for garden waste re-usable bags (if the charge for garden waste collection was not approved) and £2 for 25 plastic refuse sacks.

Members clarified the existing procedure for issuing replacement bins with the Head of Service and there was discussion regarding the issue of stolen and damaged bins. Members raised concerns that introducing a charge for bins would result in aggravation for residents and create an administrative burden for the Authority.

The Scrutiny Committee discussed the proposal and, by a show of hands, RECOMMENDED to Cabinet that the proposal to charge for replacement bins and food caddies be withdrawn, and that a charge be introduced for replacement garden waste bags and plastic bin bags.

The next element of suggested savings related to the proposal to introduce a van and trailer ban at civic amenity sites, with a projected saving of £50,000. The Head of Service informed Members that the sites were currently experiencing abuse with regards to the dumping of trade waste and there was evidence that this was originating from tradesmen from neighbouring county boroughs. Members had previously queried whether a charge could be introduced instead of a ban and it was confirmed that this would need to be at least £50 for a car-derived van or small trailer and at least £100 for a larger van or pick up truck or a large

trailer. Members were advised that the options available were to keep the current civic amenity arrangements, introduce a van ban using barrier systems or introduce a charging regime using a barrier system.

Discussion ensued regarding the feasibility of introducing a charging regime and the Head of Service highlighted potential problems associated with this option. He stated that his preferred option would be a van and trailer ban, as charging would present a number of implementation difficulties. Members raised queries in relation to potential fly tipping and queried a number of alternatives to a van and trailer ban with the Head of Service.

Following detailed discussion, the Scrutiny Committee, by a show of hands, RECOMMENDED to Cabinet that a charging regime for vans and trailers at civic amenity sites, using a barrier system, be introduced.

The next element of suggested savings related to the proposal to review the weekend park cleansing service, with a projected saving of £10,000. Members were informed that a number of parks within the Authority were currently cleansed on weekends between 7am and 11am, which incorporated significant on-costs relating to contractual overtime and travelling. Proposed savings options included the complete cleansing programme being discontinued on weekends, or for park rangers to cleanse the parks later on in the day within the summer months.

Detailed discussion ensued regarding this proposal and Members queried the possibility of park rangers cleansing the parks in the mornings instead. It was confirmed that this was not possible due to park activities taking place in the afternoon and that not all parks within the Authority utilised park rangers. Members also queried the possibility of amending staff working patterns to ensure the cleansing of parks over the weekends, and the Head of Service confirmed that this was not an option due to the impact it would have on other areas of the service, including an operational impact on sports pitches. Members reiterated their concerns that a reduced programme of cleaning could potentially lead to broken glass being left over the weekend. The Head of Service outlined the protocol regarding emergency cleansing and also referenced the Pride in Your Pitch scheme, which engages with local sports clubs and encourages and enables them to take greater ownership of the condition of their pitches.

Following detailed discussion, the Scrutiny Committee, by a show of hands, unanimously RECOMMENDED to Cabinet that the arrangements to review the weekend park cleansing service be withdrawn and that the current arrangements be retained.

Members then discussed a query raised by Councillor J. Bevan relating to the proposed closure of Rhymney Civic Amenity Centre. Councillor Bevan acknowledged that whilst the site was not as popular as the other amenity centres, nevertheless it was still in use, and he requested that this recommendation be reconsidered. Members raised concerns that the closure of the site could lead to an increase in fly-tipping, and the Head of Service suggested that the site could possibly be retained with reduced operating hours and the loss of one post.

Following detailed discussion, the Scrutiny Committee RECOMMENDED to Cabinet that the proposal to close Rhymney Civic Amenity Centre be withdrawn, and that the site remain open with reduced operating hours.

Councillor J.A. Pritchard was then invited to speak in relation to the proposal to close the cafeteria at Caerphilly Leisure Centre. She declared an interest as a service user of the cafeteria and as a result was advised by the Democratic Services Manager to leave the meeting following her presentation.

Councillor Pritchard addressed the Scrutiny Committee and stated that she was anxious to convey how many people used the cafeteria and how valued it was. A petition was currently in circulation, with users also intending to write to the Chief Executive to oppose the closure.

Councillor Pritchard informed Members that the cafeteria meant a lot to users, including a place for people to chat, support workers to meet their clients and for older people to have access to a hot meal. Councillor Pritchard also emphasised the link to exercise classes at the leisure centre and referenced the benefit of the cafeteria to users' social and mental well being.

Councillor Pritchard suggested that various options could be introduced in order to address the losses of the cafeteria, including raising prices, looking at subsidisation or putting the cafeteria out to franchise or social enterprising options. In summarising, Councillor Pritchard requested that the proposal to close the cafeteria be examined in more detail.

Councillor Pritchard was thanked for her presentation and she left the meeting.

The Head of Community and Leisure Services then presented the saving proposal relating to the closure of the cafeteria, with a projected saving of £47,000 over two years. The Head of Service reiterated it was now the only leisure centre with a cafeteria and that the facility was non-profitable, with users sitting in the cafeteria for prolonged periods of time but buying very little food or drink. The cafeteria also required the replacement of equipment in the region of £130,000, and the closure had been endorsed by the Authority's Catering section. Members were advised that removing the cafeteria would result in an opportunity for an improved exercise facility and that a high quality vending machine could be installed in place of the cafeteria. The Head of Service added that when the exercise referral team were not using the space, it could be used as a viewing area or as an activity area.

Detailed discussion ensued and Members clarified the current staff arrangements, with the Head of Service confirming that the one full-time member of staff was potentially looking to retire and that the other part-time staff were also employed elsewhere in the Authority. Members also discussed how the proposals were communicated to cafeteria staff, and reiterated views of users in that the cafeteria appeared to be experiencing busy levels of trade. The Head of Service confirmed that the intended closure date was April 2014 and reiterated that the cafeteria was not making enough profit in order to sustain its operation. Members were also reminded that the room would still be available for community use, albeit with a vending machine.

The Scrutiny Committee discussed the proposal and, by a show of hands, RECOMMENDED to Cabinet that the savings proposal to close the cafeteria at Caerphilly Leisure Centre be supported.

The Head of Service was thanked for his presentation.

Pauline Elliott, Head of Regeneration and Planning, presented further information relating to suggested savings for 2014/15 for her Service Area.

The first element of suggested savings related to the proposal to introduce car parking charges at country parks, which would generate an estimated income of £85,000. Members had previously queried the capital investment in relation to this proposal amongst concerns it would cancel out any projected income for 2014/15.

The Head of Service confirmed that the department already had 10 machines in stock which would be installed to implement the car parking charges, and that she was confident of the income amount that had been estimated. It was clarified that any investment would be met from the 2013/14 budget and that the estimated income for 2014/15 would be £85,000.

The Scrutiny Committee discussed the proposal and, by a show of hands, unanimously RECOMMENDED to Cabinet that the proposal to implement car parking charges at country parks be supported.

The next element of suggested savings related to the reduction of the enhanced maintenance budget. Members had previously requested further information in relation to how this specific saving would be achieved. The Head of Service explained that the figures provided at the previous budget meeting were incorrect and that the proposed savings were £80,000 from a £97,000 budget, with £17,000 remaining.

The Head of Service clarified the meaning of the enhanced maintenance budget for Regeneration and Planning, explaining that it was a supplementary budget to the core maintenance budget. Members were informed that only around £5,000 of the enhanced maintenance budget had been spent in 2013/14 and that the enhanced maintenance spend varied from year to year. The reduction to the enhanced maintenance budget would therefore enable it to be allocated more proactively.

The Scrutiny Committee discussed the proposal and, by a show of hands, unanimously RECOMMENDED to Cabinet that the proposal to reduce the enhanced maintenance budget be supported.

The Head of Service was thanked for her presentation.

Rob Hartshorn, Head of Public Protection, made the final presentation of the evening to Members and presented further information relating to suggested savings for 2014/15 for his Service Area.

The first element of suggested savings proposed the introduction of a £20 fee for household rat treatments. This would generate a projected saving of £19,000. A concession of 50% would be granted for those on income support or guaranteed pension credit. It was confirmed that the cost of treatments in sheltered housing accommodation would be met by the Housing department.

Members discussed the proposed charge and raised concerns that it would have an adverse effect on people on low incomes. Members also feared that the charge would act as a deterrent to the reporting of rat infestations.

Following detailed discussion, the Scrutiny Committee determined that they could not support the proposal and, by a show of hands, unanimously RECOMMENDED to Cabinet that the proposal to introduce a £20 fee for household rat treatments be withdrawn.

The final element of suggested savings related to a proposal to increase licensing fees by 5%. At this point, Councillors J. Bevan and D. Price declared an interest as they are Members of the Licensing Committee. They were advised by the Democratic Services Manager that the proposal under discussion related to taxi tariffs, which was not under the remit of the Licensing Committee, and therefore there was no requirement for them to declare an interest.

The suggested savings proposal to increase licensing fee income by 5% would generate a projected saving of £8,000. Members had asked for further information on tariffs, which is the fare that taxis charge customers. Members were advised that tariffs had not increased since 2010, and in a comparison of Tariff 1 fares, CCBC was placed 316th out of 364 local authorities, making their tariffs one of the lowest in the country. A comparison of Tariff 1 fares showed CCBC on £4.80, compared with Newport on £5.10, Rhondda Cynon Taff £5.20, Cardiff £5.40, Torfaen £4.80, Merthyr £4.50 and Blaenau Gwent £4.30. The Head of Service explained that there were plans to consult with the taxi trade on tariffs this year, should a decision be taken to increase fees.

The Scrutiny Committee discussed the proposal and, by a show of hands, unanimously RECOMMENDED to Cabinet that the proposal to increase licensing fees by 5% be supported.

The Head of Service was thanked for his presentation.

The meeting closed at 19.56 pm.

Approved as a correct record and subject to any amendments or corrections agreed and recorded in the minutes of the meeting held on 18th February 2014, they were signed by the Chairman.

CHAIRMAN