



REGENERATION AND ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, YSTRAD MYNACH ON THURSDAY, 12TH JUNE 2014 AT 5.30 P.M.

PRESENT:

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

Councillors:

J. Bevan, C.J. Cuss, R.T. Davies, N. Dix, C. Elsbury, R.W. Gough, Ms J.G. Jones, S. Kent, Mrs P. Leonard, Mrs E. Stenner.

Cabinet Members:

K. James (Regeneration, Planning and Sustainable Development) and T.J. Williams (Highways, Transportation and Engineering).

Together with:

S. Aspinall (Acting Deputy Chief Executive), T. Shaw (Head of Engineering Services), C. Campbell (Transportation Engineering Manager), M. Lloyd (Highway Operations Group Manager), C. Forbes-Thompson (Scrutiny Research Officer) and R. Barrett (Committee Services Officer).

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Mrs A. Blackman, M.J. Prew and Mrs D. Price, together with Cabinet Member D.V. Poole (Community and Leisure Services).

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillors J. Bevan, Mrs J. Jones, Mrs E.M. Aldworth, R. Gough and R.T. Davies declared an interest in Agenda Item 3(1) - Section 4.4.4 – Concessionary Pass Replacements. Details are minuted with the respective item.

Councillor C. Elsbury declared an interest in Agenda Item 3(1) - Appendix 2 – 16/17 Options for Savings (Festive Lighting). Details are minuted with the respective item.

Councillor Mrs E. Aldworth declared an interest in item 3(1) - Section 4.4.6 – Events in Pay and Display Car Parks. Details are minuted with the respective item.

REPORTS OF OFFICERS

Consideration was given to the following reports.

3. **ENGINEERING SERVICES DIVISION MEDIUM FINANCIAL PLAN 2015/16 AND 2016/17 – ITEMS FOR CONSIDERATION**

The Chair welcomed those present to the first of four special Regeneration and Environment Scrutiny Committee meetings, which marked the start of a wider comprehensive timetable of meetings within the Authority relating to the budget planning process for 2015/16 and 2016/17. The other three special Regeneration and Environment Scrutiny Committee meetings were scheduled for the coming months, with each meeting focusing on a specific division within the Directorate of the Environment. A further special Scrutiny meeting would take place in the autumn to discuss savings and efficiencies for the four areas and the views of the Committee at each individual scrutiny meeting.

Sandra Aspinall, Acting Deputy Chief Executive, introduced the report, which sought Members' comments on the suggested Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) from the Engineering Services division, containing a range of proposed savings and efficiencies for the period 2015/16 to 2016/17. These comments would subsequently be forwarded, together with other feedback, to Cabinet for their consideration. It was emphasised to Members that the aim of the first round of special Scrutiny meetings was to seek initial views on the savings and efficiencies proposed for the next two financial years, further to definitive proposals emerging at a later point in 2014 for consideration at that time.

Terry Shaw, Head of Engineering Services, presented the report detailing the suggested savings and efficiencies for his area and reminded Members that required savings for the Authority totalled £6.5m for 2015/16 and £6.9m for 2016/17. Members were advised that the budget strategy identified two main strands in order to achieve this estimated savings requirement of £13.4m, these being the review of discretionary services and the delivery of further efficiencies of up to 3% on statutory or essential services.

With regard to Engineering Services, 3 discretionary areas for review had been identified, namely Street Lighting, School Crossing Patrols and Public Transport Subsidy, and these were included in the report, together with proposals for 3% efficiency savings and a summary of proposed savings and efficiencies for 2016/17.

Members were advised that no firm budget targets were set as yet and that the aim of the meeting was for Members to consider and comment on the proposals and for further information to be requested if it was felt necessary. These views would assist in providing an overview of the budget targets, savings and efficiencies required. It was advised that the financial situation facing the Authority was worse than what had been originally predicted.

The first element of suggested savings for the Engineering Services division related to Street Lighting Energy Reductions. The report contained a large number of options to reduce street lighting, together with costs relating to the measure and technical arrangements relating to permanent disconnection.

Detailed discussion of this proposal ensued and Members queried the details of a number of options contained within the report. Concerns were raised as to whether all the associated costs for each option had been fully reflected in the report. Officers confirmed that the costs within the report were accurate and had been calculated in accordance with recommendations from Street Lighting management staff.

Members discussed LED lighting detailed in Option 12 of the report, and Officers replied to a number of queries surrounding the uses and advantages of this technology. Members also discussed the potential for a Central Management System (CMS) detailed in Option 11 of the

report. This technology would allow the dimming of street lights from a centralised location, and Officers confirmed that a full consultation process with the public would be undertaken should such an option be pursued. It was also arranged for Members to be provided with a list of the location of LED lights and dimmed lights currently in operation.

Following discussion on the content of the report, Members requested further information in regards to Option 11 (the introduction of a Central Management System) and Option 12 (convert all residential lighting to LED luminaires, except the existing cosmopolis). Members also requested that an additional option be included (to convert residential lighting to cosmopolis lighting) and that a report be prepared in regards to this.

Members felt unable to support the remaining options and recommended that they be removed from the list of suggested savings

The next element of suggested savings related to School Crossing Patrols and proposed the withdrawal of this service following a period of consultation. There are currently 63 permanent members of staff employed within the service, together with 3 relief staff, serving 42 primary schools across the county borough. The implication note within the report considered this option in more detail. The report advised Members that this was not a statutory service and that this measure had already been proposed by a number of other local authorities. Withdrawing the service would bring about a projected saving of £360,000.

The assessment criteria relating to crossing points was discussed and Officers queried that at present, each location was reviewed upon retirement or resignation of the post holder, and then the service was removed if it did not meet such criteria. Officers suggested that an assessment review of each site could be undertaken as an alternative option to withdrawing the service altogether, should Members wished to pursue such an option.

A number of concerns were raised by Members in regards to the impact that withdrawing the service would have on the safety of children within the borough. Members were unable to support the proposal in its current form and recommended that the proposal to withdraw the SCP service be removed from the list of suggested savings and that the status quo be maintained in the meantime.

Members requested that a review of the service be undertaken in regard to assessments for each crossing location against the current national guidance and that a breakdown of the costs of the School Crossing Patrols be provided. It was advised that this review would take approximately 12 months and the Committee requested that the proposal be brought to them for reconsideration upon completion of the review.

The final element of suggested savings related to the Public Transport Subsidy and proposals regarding the withdrawal of financial support for certain bus journeys. The report informed Members that whilst many bus journeys within the borough operate commercially without subsidy, all evening and Sunday services are subsidised by the Council, along with many daytime routes that serve more isolated communities. The Council spends £700,000 per annum maintaining these services, supplemented by £380,000 grant funding from the Welsh Government.

Five options were detailed within the report for Members' comments - withdrawal of Sunday and bank holiday services, withdrawal of evening services, the targeting of contracts with subsidies in excess of £1.50 or £3 per passenger, and withdrawal of support for daytime services. Members were advised that cuts to journey subsidies had previously been implemented in September 2013 as part of budget savings, and that the proposals would require extensive consultation with appropriate timescales. The report advised Members that bus services are operating in an ever-changing financial environment which could be compounded should the Welsh Government implement further funding cuts.

Each of the report options was discussed in detail and a number of concerns were raised regarding the proposals. Members stated that the proposals could have a significant impact on those who rely on buses as their only means of transport, such as travelling to work, shopping and hospital appointments, and that it could lead to remote estates becoming even more isolated. It was explained that daytime services on commercial routes were not included in these proposals as revenue was derived from fare-paying passengers, and that the report was looking at subsidised journeys with a lower passenger rate. It was confirmed that the information relating to passenger numbers was derived from bus ticket sales.

Following detailed consideration of the report, Members felt unable to support the options listed without detailed analysis of the proposals. Further information was requested in regards to each of these options, including details of the routes affected, the number of passengers using these routes, the impact of withdrawal, peak-time options, and alternatives in regards to each of the options listed in the report.

The next section of the report proposed efficiency savings of up to 3% on a number of statutory or essential services, namely carriageway resurfacing, footway resurfacing, concessionary pass replacements, highway adoption and agreement fees, events in pay and display car parks and car park tariffs. The report suggested efficiencies that could be made within each of these services, with the proposed savings totalled £352,000.

Members discussed each of these proposed efficiencies in turn, raising a number of queries and concerns in regards to these options.

Regarding the resurfacing of carriageways and footways, the report proposed a budget reduction to the planned maintenance aspect of the service, which equated to a saving of £200,000 for carriageway resurfacing and £50,000 for footway resurfacing. Concerns were raised regarding the impact that this reduction could have on insurance liability and public safety, with Members requesting further information regarding these proposals.

The next element of efficiency savings related to the proposal to increase the replacement costs for concessionary travel passes.

Councillors J. Bevan, Mrs J. Jones, Mrs E. Aldworth, R. Gough and R.T. Davies had earlier declared an interest in this item, in that they are concessionary bus pass holders. Councillors J. Bevan and R.T. Davies had left the meeting by this point, and as there were no recommendations being made at this meeting, the remaining Members who declared an interest were not required to leave the room during discussion of this item.

The report advised that the first replacement is currently free of charge with subsequent replacements costing £5 each. The proposal suggested an increase to £5 for the first replacement and £10 for subsequent replacements, raising an additional £7000 per annum. It was confirmed that this charge would apply to all concessionary holders, and Members supported the proposal to increase the replacement costs for concessionary travel passes.

The next element of efficiency savings proposed the review of fees currently charged to developers to administer highway agreements and complete highway adoptions. This was last reviewed in 2012 with it proposed that the fees and charges be reviewed again and increased to 10%, achieving a saving of £15,000 per annum. Members asked for information and comparison with other local authorities for additional increases above 10%, and supported the proposal to review and increase highway adoptions and agreements.

The next element of efficiency savings proposed to cease the holding of Council events in the Council's off-street pay and display car parks. Councillor Mrs E. Aldworth declared an interest in this item in that she has relatives with businesses within Caerphilly Town Centre. As there were no recommendations being made at this meeting, Councillor Aldworth was not required to leave the room during discussion of this item.

Members were informed that these events result in a loss of income to the Authority as the car parks are out of use for the duration of the event, which can be up to two weeks in some cases. This efficiency would achieve a saving of £20,000 per annum. Officers clarified the details contained within the report and Members supported the proposal to cease the use of pay and display car parks for Council events, subject to further liaison with the Planning and Regeneration division.

The final element of efficiency savings proposed to increase car park tariffs by 10p an hour, which were last increased in Summer 2010. Members were informed that there would be implementation costs totalling £15,000 and that this efficiency would achieve a saving of £60,000 per annum. Members requested further information regarding this savings option and for additional options to be explored, including charging in all car parks and park and ride car parks, the parity of charges across areas and the impact of such charges.

Appendix 1 formed the basis of the final section of the report and listed all other statutory and discretionary service areas previously identified as possible savings. As they were over and above the requirements of the budget strategy for 2015/16, they were not subject to the level of detail contained elsewhere in the report. However, it was possible that they could form the basis of future consideration for savings options for the year 2016/17.

Officers encouraged Members to examine the service areas listed within Appendix 1, and welcomed their views and suggestions in regards to bringing these areas forward for future consideration within the budget planning process.

Members firstly discussed the statutory service areas listed within Appendix 1, raising a number of concerns and queries regarding several of the options, and also requested further information in relation to some of the items listed.

Two options within the statutory service areas related to reducing planned and reactive maintenance budgets for highways and land drainage were proposed, with estimated savings totalling £50,000. Members highlighted instances of flooding across the Authority and subsequently felt unable to support these options.

Further information was requested regarding the savings proposal to cut the highway reactive maintenance budget, with suggested cuts of between 4% and 8% and with savings of £50,000 to £100,000.

Discussion took place regarding winter maintenance in regards to the proposal to reduce the amount of salt bins and amount of roads salted, with savings estimated at £60,000. Officers responded to queries regarding the issuing of salt bins, and concerns were raised regarding the impact of any reduction to the salting regime on public safety, with Members requesting further information regarding this proposal.

The list of options included a proposal for further budget reductions to the planned maintenance aspect of resurfacing carriageways and footway maintenance, with savings ranging from £350,000 to £1,000,000, dependent on the level of reduction. Members queried the impact of varying percentages of any cuts and what level of cuts could be effectively borne by the Council. Further information was requested regarding these savings options.

An option to consider maintenance savings to structures and retaining walls was listed, with savings varying from £50,000 to £100,000. There was also an option regarding Consultancy Structures SLA, with savings ranging from £14,000 to £28,000, and it was advised that options regarding this saving were dependant on changes to the budget to structures and retaining walls. Members requested further information regarding these savings options.

The list included an option to reduce the budget for aids to movement markers (road markings/signs/crossing points) by 10%, which would bring about a saving of £10,000.

Officers confirmed they were becoming more proactive and efficient in their methods of maintaining such markers, and Members subsequently supported this option.

Members then discussed the discretionary service areas listed within Appendix 1, and again highlighted a number of concerns and queries regarding some of the items listed and requested further information regarding several of the options

A number of options relating to the operation and maintenance of bus stations and shelters were proposed and discussed, including the introduction of public bus operator departure charges, reductions to bus shelter cleansing, repairs and maintenance, and reductions to the cleansing schedule at Blackwood and Bargoed bus stations. Savings would range from £120,100 to £126,200 depending on the level of reductions. Members commented that the cleansing programme had already been reduced and were subsequently unable to support these options.

The school crossing patrol lunchtime service was listed as a potential option with a saving of £40,000. Members discussed this option and requested further information regarding this proposal. The option regarding the review of the service that provides school travel plans and road safety education was also discussed, with possible savings of £50,000. Members requested further information regarding this savings option, including an option to reduce or remove some elements of the service.

The Community Assets Community Response Team was included in the list of options with a potential saving of £100,000. The role of the Team was clarified, and Members requested further information regarding this savings option, which would be detailed at a further special Regeneration and Environment Scrutiny Committee meeting in September 2014 relating to savings in the Public Protection division.

An option to further increase off-street parking charges additional to those already addressed in the main report was discussed by Members. Savings would range from £60,000 to £100,000. It was agreed that clarification in the form of further information would be required on the matter and was requested from Officers.

An option to review the management of off-street car parks was also listed and the potential scenarios within were outlined by Officers, including the introduction of pay and display into various locations, charges for Sunday parking, and another option for fixed penalty charges. Potential savings would total between £15,000 and £40,000. It was arranged for further information relating to the introduction of pay and display and Sunday parking charges to be included in the earlier report requested relating to the review of car park tariffs. Members supported the third option to increase the excess charge notice penalty.

The reduction of street lighting innovative technology trials were listed as a potential saving of between £50,000 and £90,000. It was agreed that this option would be put on hold pending further information being provided on the discretionary areas for street lighting agreed earlier in the evening (Options 11, 12 and the additional option relating to cosmopolis lighting). Once this information had been received and reviewed, a decision would then be made on the innovative technology trials.

The promotion of the gully reed bed recycling facility, with a view to increasing income by up to £10,000 was discussed, and Members supported this option.

The removal of local authority financial support to Christmas lighting in towns and villages was discussed. Councillor C. Elsbury declared an interest in this proposal as he advises a company that could potentially pick up the contract for festive lighting, and left the meeting at this point. Members supported this option but asked for a list of affected areas to be provided.

At the close of the meeting, the number of Member requests for further information were

reviewed by Officers. It was agreed by Members that wherever possible, rather than new reports being produced, the additional options and information requested could be added to existing reports, subject to the new information being clearly indicated within the reports.

The meeting closed at 7.46 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