



SPECIAL REGENERATION AND ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, YSTRAD MYNACH ON
MONDAY 19TH DECEMBER 2016 AT 5.30 P.M.**

PRESENT:

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

Councillors:

M. Adams, L. Harding, R.W. Gough, S. Kent, P. Marsden, M.J. Prew

Cabinet Member:

T.J. Williams (Highways, Transportation and Engineering)

Together with:

N. Scammell (Acting Director of Corporate Services and Section 151 Officer), S. Harris (Interim Head of Corporate Finance), M. Eedy (Finance Manager - Environment Directorate), L. Dallimore (Medium Term Financial Plan Programme Coordinator), B. Davies (Solicitor) and R. Barrett (Committee Services Officer)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors C.J. Cuss, C. Elsbury, Mrs A. Leonard and Mrs E. Stenner, together with Cabinet Members N. George (Community and Leisure Services) and K. James (Regeneration, Planning and Sustainable Development).

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor D.T. Davies declared an interest in Agenda Item 3 (Draft Budget Proposals for 2017/18) in respect of Bowling Green rationalisation. Details are minuted with the respective item.

REPORTS OF OFFICERS

Consideration was given to the following report.

3. DRAFT BUDGET PROPOSALS FOR 2017/18

Councillor D.T. Davies declared an interest in this item as he is a member of Bargoed Bowls Club. In that the interest was deemed to be personal and not prejudicial, he remained in the meeting room during consideration of the item.

The report, which was presented to Cabinet on 30th November 2016, provided Members with details of draft budget proposals and draft savings proposals for the 2017/18 financial year, to allow for a period of consultation prior to a final decision in February 2017.

Members noted the headline issues in the WG Provisional 2017/18 Local Government Financial Settlement (which was published on 19th October 2016) and the details of the draft budget proposals for 2017/18. The report detailed Whole Authority Cost Pressures (£2.745m), Inescapable Service Pressures (£6.186m), and the Reduction in Welsh Government Funding (£0.608m). Additionally, the report outlined draft savings proposals for 2017/18 (£8.653m) and a proposed Council Tax Uplift of 1% (£0.886m) which will ensure that a balanced budget is deliverable for 2017/18.

The report outlined the financial pressures placed on service areas, with significant pressure on Social Services for essential payments in relation to the National Living Wage that had an impact on suppliers contract prices to CCBC, and the ever-increasing demand for services in both Adult and Children's Services. As a result, the report proposed that £3.5m be allocated in the 2017/18 budget to meet the ongoing financial pressures within Social Services. It was explained that cost pressures for schools are excluded as these will be funded through a proposed increase of 1.25% in the funding provided to schools.

Members were advised that although the provisional 2017/18 financial settlement is better than originally anticipated, the emerging cost pressures identified have resulted in a net savings requirement of £8.653m. Members were referred to Table 6 of the report, which provided details of the draft savings proposals that, alongside the proposed increase of 1% in Council Tax, will enable a balanced budget to be achieved. Included in the proposals are £3.037m of savings identified for 2017/18 that do not have a direct impact on service users or the public. A saving of £3.5m has also been proposed through undertaking a review of the Authority's Minimum Revenue Provision Policy, details of which were reported to the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee on the 7th December 2016. A Members' Seminar has been scheduled for the 12th January 2017 which will allow Members to be fully briefed on the proposed changes, ahead of the proposals being presented to Cabinet and thereafter Council for consideration.

During the course of the ensuing debate, reference was made to 'nil impact' savings (such as vacancy management, budget realignment and service provision). Members expressed a need for the Council to be mindful of staff wellbeing when applying these savings, and raised concerns regarding staffing reductions (especially in smaller teams) and the impact that subsequent service pressures could have on individuals. Officers gave examples of how these reductions could be spread out (such as a loss of a 0.5fte post in a team of 30 staff) and agreed to circulate further information to the Scrutiny Committee for sickness data related to work-related stress.

Members were assured that the Council is committed to promoting employee wellbeing and reducing work-related stress for all its employees as much as possible. Officers also explained that appropriate consultation will take place with staff and trade unions before any restructuring arrangements are implemented. Moving forward, Members were reminded of the difficult times faced by the Authority and the continued need to examine potential savings across all service areas. Officers advised that 'nil' impact savings would present a much smaller proportion of savings moving forward.

Discussion took place regarding the details of Bowling Green rationalisation (agreed by Cabinet in March 2016) and Officers confirmed that this process had entailed a number of voluntary redundancy severance arrangements. Members sought further information on the Apprenticeship Levy, and Officers explained that there is currently no clear guidance from Welsh Government on this matter. Reference was also made to a shortfall in income generation for car parking charges at country parks during 2016/17 and Officers confirmed that measures were being looked at to ensure the income target was achieved.

Following consideration and discussion of the report, it was moved and seconded that the following recommendations be supported. By a show of hands (and in noting there was 1 abstention), this was agreed by the majority present.

RESOLVED that for the reasons contained in the Officer's report: -

- (i) the draft 2017/18 budget proposals, including the proposed savings totalling £8.653m, be endorsed;
- (ii) the proposal to increase Council Tax by 1% for the 2017/18 financial year to ensure that a balanced budget is achieved (Council Tax Band D being set at £1,011.96) be supported;
- (iii) the consultation process for the draft budget proposals be endorsed, prior to final 2017/18 budget proposals being presented to Cabinet and Council in February 2017.

The meeting closed at 5.56 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 14th February 2017, they were signed by the Chair.

CHAIR