



SPECIAL REGENERATION AND ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE ON WEDNESDAY
13TH DECEMBER 2017 AT 5.30PM.**

PRESENT:

Councillor D.T Davies - Chair
Councillor Mrs C. Forehead - Vice Chair

Councillors:

C. Elsbury, Mrs C. Forehead, R.W. Gough, A. Hussey, S. Kent, A. Whitcombe, T.J. Williams, W. Williams and B. Zaplatynski.

Cabinet Members:

N. George (Neighbourhood Services), S. Morgan (Economy, Infrastructure and Sustainability) and Mrs E. Stenner (Environment and Public Protection).

Together with:

C. Harrhy (Corporate Director Communities), S. Harris (Interim Head of Corporate Finance), P. Hudson (Marketing and Events Manager), M. Lloyd (Head of Programmes), M.S. Williams (Head of Community and Leisure), A. Bolter (Business and Support Funding Manager) and E. Sullivan (Interim Scrutiny Officer).

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors J. Bevan, A.G. Higgs, J. Ridgwell, J. Scriven and G. Simmonds.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest received at the commencement or during the course of the meeting.

REPORTS OF OFFICERS

Consideration was given to the following reports:-

3. DRAFT BUDGET PROPOSALS FOR 2018/19

Mr S. Harris (Interim Head of Corporate Finance) introduced the report which was presented to and approved by Cabinet at its meeting on the 15th November 2017. It detailed the draft budget proposals for the 2018/19 financial year and as part of the consultation process the savings proposals contained therein were being presented to scrutiny committees for their consideration and comment.

In order to provide some financial context Mr Harris outlined the key elements of the Welsh Government Provisional 2018/19 Local Government Financial Settlement. Members were referred to the Transfers In and New Responsibilities and were advised that after adjusting for these Caerphilly would face a net cash reduction of £2.965m compared to the 2017/18 financial year. Changes to other Passported Grants were detailed within section 4.1.3 and resulted in a net reduction of £0.473m. An All-Wales indicative reduction in Aggregate External Finance of minus 1.5% has been provided by Welsh Government (WG) for the 2019/20 financial year and capital allocations available in the RSG and from the General Capital Grant have decreased by £64k from the 2017/18 financial year.

It was noted that a Council Tax increase of 4.52% would be required for the proposals under consideration to achieve a balanced budget. The proposals also assume a no growth or cash flat position for Schools. Schools would be required to manage their own pay and non-pay inflationary increases along with any other emerging cost pressures which in effect equated to a real terms cut of 1.68%. Mr Harris confirmed that £7.205m of savings would need to be delivered across the other services areas within the Council which equated to 3.24% of current budgets.

In terms of cost pressures, Members were advised that a proposed £1.5m would need to be allocated to Social Services in the 2018/19 budget to fund increases in fees for external care providers. This was due to the introduction of the National Living Wage and additional costs arising from increased demand for services including child placements.

Members were referred to section 4.3 of the report which detailed savings proposals with no public impact which had the potential to achieve £4.692m of savings, low public impact savings of £1.218m and medium public impact savings of £1.305m. It was explained that no impact savings were derived from vacancy management, budget realignment and minor changes to service provision.

In conclusion Mr Harris summarised the outlook for future years and drew Members attention to a potential savings requirement of £22.161m for the three-year period 2019/20 to 2021/22 and advised that this assumed a cash flat position in term of the WG Financial Settlement for each of these years. Changes to this position would therefore directly impact on the savings requirements from Caerphilly County Borough Council going forward. For example should the minus 1.5% reduction for 2019/20 be replicated in 2020/21 and 2021/22 further savings of £7.789m would be required. The Officer confirmed that a seminar would be held week commencing the 8th January 2018 to help Members bring together common themes and provide alternative savings proposals.

The Chair thanked the Officer and the Corporate Director of Communities for the report and Members questions and comments we welcomed as part of the consultation process.

Members agreed that they would provide comment only on those proposals within the remit of this committee's terms of reference as detailed within the 2018/19 Draft Savings Proposals for the Communities Directorate (Agenda Item No. 4). Members who expressed concerns in relation to savings lying within the remit of the Health Social Care and Wellbeing (HSCWB) Scrutiny Committee agreed to bring those forward at the aforementioned seminar. Councillor D.T. Davies and Councillor P. Leonard expressed their intention to speak at the special HSCWB scrutiny committee meeting on the 15th December 2018 in relation to Rat Treatment Fees, the deletion of two vacant Community Safety Warden Posts and the Decommissioning of the Age Concern Hospital Discharge contract.

Having fully considered its content it was moved and seconded that the report be noted and by show of hands this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that the Draft Budget Proposals for 2018/19 be noted.

4. 2018/19 DRAFT SAVINGS PROPOSALS FOR THE COMMUNITIES DIRECTORATE

Mrs C. Harrhy, Corporate Director Communities introduced the report with detailed the 2018/19 draft savings proposals for the Communities Directorate. The Directorate which delivered the majority of the front line services provided within the borough was comprised of four divisions, namely Community and Leisure Services, Engineering, Regeneration and Planning and Housing.

Members were advised that the savings proposed had been categorised by public impact and totalled £817,000 from Community and Leisure Services, £888,000 from Engineering Services and £454,000 from Regeneration and Planning. Full details of the savings proposals were appended to the report and included Equality Impact Assessments.

The Chair thanked the Corporate Director for the report and referred Members to its appendices it was agreed that the proposals would be considered by directorate.

Engineering Services Division

Mr M. Lloyd, Acting Head of Engineering Services introduced the proposed savings relating to the Engineering Services Division and highlighted those with low to medium public impact.

Members were advised that this division had proposed 12 savings which had been deemed to have a 'low' impact on the public which included traffic management and maintenance. There were 3 proposed 'medium' impact savings in relation to a reduction in the Highways Maintenance Budget achieving a saving of £110.4k, a reduction in Carriageway Surface Dressing/Resurfacing saving £310k and finally a reduction in scheduled Gully Cleansing and vehicles saving £107k.

Clarification was sought in relation to the Consultancy/Road Survey Budget Reduction proposal and whether this related to road condition reports. The Officer confirmed that this related to data required to meet Welsh Government performance indicators rather than road condition reports.

With regard to the proposed saving detailed at 3 (1) of Appendix 2, Reduction in the Highways Maintenance budget, concern was expressed about the long term impact of reducing safety fencing, general maintenance, footway surfacing, culvert inspections and tip maintenance and the potential for far greater cost in the future. A Councillor asked if consideration could be given to withdrawing financial support for non-essential events such as the Velathon, and reinvesting said sums into front-line services. The Officer accepted there could be long-term implications from the proposed savings should reductions continue over time and the risks had been identified within the report. It was acknowledged that doing less over time would have an impact on the condition of the borough's roads and there would be a tipping point when the planned maintenance reduction would be overtaken by the increased need for reactive maintenance.

Mention was made to the City Deal and the impact a reduction in road maintenance could have on public transportation routes, which might be changed or have increased use as a result of the project. The Member felt that the impact of reducing maintenance and repairs could impact the future viability of the borough as road conditions deteriorate.

Concerns were also expressed in the relation to saving 3(3), Scheduled Gully Cleansing and the reduction in the frequency and the loss of one vehicle, primarily the increased risks of flooding during periods of inclement weather when debris could quickly cause blockages. The Officer explained that the cleansing programme would be priority based but the saving would mean 24% less coverage so the public would see an impact.

In relation to the Winter Maintenance Budget and the proposed utilisation of weather forecasting models to target gritting schedules, Members requested clarification on the level of accuracy that could be achieved using such models. The Officer outlined the nature of the forecasting banding systems and how they would be used to target gritting during periods of inclement weather. He advised that these systems provided more specific data obtained in 'real time' from various weather stations positioned at different heights throughout the borough. Using this data, areas at risk can be quickly identified and teams immediately pulled in to get the salt put down.

Reference was made to the suggested savings relating to School Crossing Patrol provision and Members asked if volunteers could be used to continue the service. It was explained that the service would only be discontinued at the retirement of the current post holder. It was noted that there were certain HR issues in relation to paid/unpaid persons holding the same post and there were also criteria compliance implications that would need to be adhered to. However Officers were aware that certain authorities in England had used volunteers and confirmed that a further piece of work was being undertaken with HR and Health and Safety colleagues in this regard, although this was at a very early stage.

Concerns were express with regard to the proposed reduction in the Traffic Signals Maintenance budget and the impact that breakdowns could have on road safety. Officers confirmed that the £7000 saving would be achieved by changing the approach to maintenance for before life expired to life expired and confirmed that there may be times when traffic signals would be out of action. Members questioned the relatively small amount of savings that could be achieved compared to the possible risks.

Members were reminded that should this saving not be supported then alternative efficiencies would need to be found.

It was suggested that in order to safeguard essential services a reduction in the number of festivities or tourism events which are supported by the Council and incur additional expenditure be considered.

Reference was made to the reduction in relation to Tree Maintenance and a report recently presented to this committee which sought permission to make increase to the service, which now seemed to be contradicted by this proposal. Mrs Harray acknowledged this disparity and confirmed that she would seek further clarification.

In terms of the proposed reduction in Tips Maintenance further detail was sought as to how the inspection process would now be taken forward. Members were advised that going forward inspections would be carried out remotely using drones. The drone would provide a detailed 3D image of the tip being surveyed; this image would then be overlaid on previous surveys to present an accurate topographical depiction of the tip highlighting any changes.

Members asked if there would be capacity to continue a reduced manual inspection process to follow-up on the drone technology and it was acknowledged that the drone data might well identify the need for such inspections and if so working practices could be revisited.

Following consideration of the Engineering Services Division 2018/19 draft savings proposals it was moved and seconded that the aforementioned comments and concerns be presented to Cabinet as part of the consultation process and by show of hands this was unanimously agreed.

Regeneration and Planning Division

Mrs C. Harrhy, Corporate Director Communities introduced the proposed savings relating to the Regeneration and Planning Division and highlighted that the Division had proposed four savings that had been deemed to have a low impact on the public.

Members were advised that those savings related to a reduction in the Community Regeneration Grant by £137,000, a reduction in the Business Grants Budget by £12,000, a review of the events at LLanciach Fawr saving £10,000 and finally a reduction in the Publicity and Promotion Budget by £7,000.

In relation to the Community Regeneration Grant a Member referenced difficulties community and voluntary groups had in drawing down funding from the grant and expressed concern that valuable local projects could be lost as a result of further cuts. Officers agreed to look at the detail to establish if changes were required in order to make application process and criteria more accessible, however this would take some time to take forward.

Reference was made with regard to Llanciach Fawr and it being closed on Monday's which meant that the opportunity for Bank Holiday revenue is lost. Officers confirmed that opening the facility on Bank Holidays was not cost effective due to the increased staffing costs needed. Members argued that not providing a tourism venue during a time when visitor numbers could be maximised made no sense and asked if costs could be offset by revising provision during other weeks of the year.

Members' referenced the proposed reduction in the publicity and promotion budget as it related to Town Centre Management marketing and referred to the wider events held throughout the borough and the cost against income generation was discussed. Members noted supplementary information requested by the Chair and tabled at the meeting in relation to the contributions made by Town and Community Council to events. Members noted the disparity in terms of the financial supported contributed by the various Town and Community Councils and agreed that if the current scheduled of events were to continue this support would need to be revisited in order to reduce the financial burden on the Authority. Members agreed that they would like to explore the possibility of reducing the number of events supported by the Council, which are non-essential, if it would secure essential front line services.

Mrs Harrhy in noting the concerns raised advised that Officers would be looking at a fundamental review of the events framework and asked if Members would like to consider adding this to their forward work programme as their input would be very valuable to the process. Members agreed that they would welcome a report reviewing the Event Framework and request that feedback be provided to this committee on possible timeframe for its inclusion on the forward work programme.

Following consideration of the Regeneration and Planning Division 2018/19 draft savings proposals and it was moved and seconded that the aforementioned comments and concerns be presented to Cabinet as part of the consultation process and by show of hands this was unanimously agreed.

Community and Leisure Services Division

Mr M.S. Williams, Head of Community and Leisure introduced the proposed savings for the Community and Leisure Services Division and highlighted that the Division had proposed 2 low impact savings and two medium impact savings.

Low impact savings related to the changing of the fee structure for the Caerphilly Adventures Service, generating £20,000 of income and the introduction of an administration fee for Duty of Care Waste Transfer Notes for commercial waste customers which would again raise an additional £20,000 in income.

In relation to the Caerphilly Adventures Services the Officer confirmed that there had been no increase in charges for the last 10 years and the proposed increase would bring fees into line with the current marketplace. Members were advised of a potential impact on other CCBC services such as EOTAS provision and therefore it is proposed that this consideration be taken into account when EOTAS provision is reviewed. The potential move of the service to Cwmcaran Forest Drive would also provide opportunities to increase private sector income generation.

The introduction of a £20 annual fee per customer for the Duty of Care Waste Transfer Notes was in line with that of private sector companies and although there might be a small risk that customers might choose to move their business they may be facing a similar charge with a different waste provider.

Medium impact savings related to the introduction of charges for all bulky household items generating an estimated additional income of £50,000 and the closure of the Pontllanfraith Leisure Centre project to make savings of £81,000 per annum.

Members expressed concern with regard to the charge across the board for bulky waste items and queried whether consideration had been given to means testing the provision in order to safeguard pensioners and those on low incomes. The Officer explained that the introduction of a 'means test' system would add a layer of bureaucracy to the process incurring additional administration costs.

Further concerns were expressed that this might lead to an increase in fly-tipping and Officers accepted that this was a potential risk however the operating models of other Councils with similar charging structures had been looked at and they had not experienced significant increases in fly-typing.

Concerns were also expressed that the proposed increase in charges contained within the MTFP proposals would have the greatest impact on those on low incomes, single parents, and pensioners. The Officer reminded Members that there was a current charging structure in place for bulky items; this proposal would only incorporate beds and 3 piece suites into this charging structure while also slightly increasing fees.

Members agreed that given the decision of Cabinet and the discussions at two previous scrutiny committee meetings with regard to the closure of the Pontllanfraith Leisure Centre this proposed saving would be noted without further comment.

Following consideration of the Community and Leisure Services Division 2018/19 draft savings proposals ,it was moved and seconded that the aforementioned comments and concerns be presented to Cabinet as part of the consultation process and by show of hands this was unanimously agreed.

'Nil Impact'

Following consideration of the 'nil' impact proposals for the Communities Directorate, as listed in Appendix 4 of the report it was moved and seconded that they be noted and by show of hands this was unanimously agreed.

The meeting closed at 18:45p.m.

Approved as a correct record and subject to any amendments or corrections agreed and recorded in the minutes of the meeting held on 13th February 2018, they were signed by the Chair.

CHAIR