



SPECIAL REGENERATION AND ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

**MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, YSTRAD
MYNACH ON TUESDAY, 18TH DECEMBER 2018 AT 5.00 P.M.**

PRESENT:

Councillor D.T. Davies - Chair

Councillors:

R.W. Gough, A.G. Higgs, A. Hussey, S. Kent, Ms P. Leonard, J. Ridgewell, G. Simmonds, A. Whitcombe, T.J. Williams, W. Williams, B. Zaplatynski

Cabinet Members:

N. George (Neighbourhood Services), S. Morgan (Economy, Infrastructure, Sustainability and Wellbeing of Future Generations Champion) and Mrs E. Stenner (Cabinet Member for Environment and Public Protection)

Together with:

M.S. Williams (Interim Corporate Director of Communities), S. Harris (Interim Head of Business Improvement Services), R. Hartshorn (Head of Public Protection, Community and Leisure Services), R. Kyte (Head of Regeneration and Planning), M. Lloyd (Head of Infrastructure), T. Llewellyn (Senior Engineer), C. Forbes-Thompson (Interim Head of Democratic Services) and R. Barrett (Committee Services Officer)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors J. Bevan, C. Elsbury, Mrs C. Forehead (Vice-Chair) and J. Scriven.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members sought advice on declaring an interest if they have involvement with a community centre. It was confirmed that if they are on the management committee of the community centre and specific funding recommendations are being considered and individual centres affected, then it would be deemed to be a prejudicial interest. Members were advised that they could initially declare a personal interest, and then declare a prejudicial interest later in the meeting and leave the room if the discussion veered into specifics. Additionally, only those Members having involvement with community centres affected by the proposals need declare, and declarations would only be required of the Scrutiny Committee itself and not the relevant Cabinet Members (as they are not

members of the Committee).

On this basis, Councillors R.W. Gough, Mrs P. Leonard, J. Ridgewell, T.J. Williams and W. Williams declared a personal interest in Agenda Item 3 (Draft Budget Proposals – Appendix 4) at the commencement of the meeting, and furthermore declared a prejudicial interest during the course of the meeting. Details are minuted with the respective item.

A Member queried if Smartcard holders should declare an interest and was advised there was no requirement to do so.

REPORTS OF OFFICERS

Consideration was given to the following reports.

3. DRAFT BUDGET PROPOSALS FOR 2019/20

Councillors R.W. Gough, Mrs P. Leonard, J. Ridgewell, T.J. Williams and W. Williams declared a personal interest in Agenda Item 3 (Draft Budget Proposals – Appendix 4) owing to their involvement with various community centres, and remained in the meeting until the relevant proposal was debated.

S. Harris (Interim Head of Business Improvement Services) presented the report, which sought the views of the Scrutiny Committee on the draft 2019/20 budget proposals considered by Cabinet on 14th November 2018. The Cabinet report set out details of the draft budget proposals based on the Welsh Government (WG) Provisional 2019/20 Local Government Financial Settlement, and also provided details of the draft savings proposals for 2019/20 totalling £14.66m.

Members were reminded of the Headline Issues relating to the provisional settlement, Whole Authority and Service Cost Pressures, Council Tax and Savings Implications and Financial Outlook for future years. The Scrutiny Committee were advised of the whole Authority cost pressures and of the inescapable service pressures being faced by the Authority. The Officer referred to the savings requirement of £14.66m for 2019/20 and advised that in looking to develop proposals to address the significant financial challenges going forward, the Council cannot continue to operate in its current format.

The proposals are based on the Welsh Government (WG) Provisional 2019/20 Local Government Financial Settlement and a higher than forecast council tax rise by 6.95% to cover a savings target of £15.6m to enable the Authority to set a balanced budget. A Members' Seminar was held on the 15th November 2018 to consider the proposals and the final report will be presented to Cabinet on the 13th February 2019 and Full Council on the 21st February 2019. It was emphasised to Members that the Authority is entering unprecedented times and there will be difficult decisions to be made in moving forward. The final Local Government Financial Settlement will be announced on 19th December 2018 and an additional Member' Seminar to provide an update on the draft proposals has been arranged for January 2019.

Mark S. Williams (Interim Corporate Director – Communities) then presented an overview of the recurring draft savings proposals across the four service divisions applicable to the Communities Directorate, which totalled £4.404m and were set out in the report. Members were reminded of the broad range of front line services provided by the directorate, which comprise a mix of statutory and discretionary services that are delivered across the county borough, and many of its services are received by every resident of the borough. The report also detailed a number of temporary savings

proposed for 2019/20 (totalling £2.079m) to assist in delivering a balanced budget.

Members were referred to the report appendices which set out departmental nil impact proposals savings, details of the permanent savings across the Communities directorate and across each service area, and temporary savings for the directorate. An Equalities Impact Assessment was also included for each proposed saving that will have a public impact. The Scrutiny Committee were also reminded of the difficult times ahead for the Council and that it would not be conducive to offset savings proposals by proposing additional increases to the Council Tax rate. Additionally, Members were reminded that should they be minded to not lend to their support to individual savings proposals, then alternative savings would need to be suggested by the Committee.

The Committee discussed each of the report appendices in turn and the respective Heads of Service were invited to the table during consideration of the savings proposals for their service area in order to respond to Members' queries.

Appendix 1 – Department Nil Impact Proposals Savings

These proposals were unanimously supported by the Committee.

Appendix 2 – Communities Directorate 2019/20 Permanent Savings Summary

Those savings with a nil impact listed against them were unanimously supported by the Committee.

Appendix 3 – Public Protection 2019/20 draft savings proposals and MTFP proformas

The Scrutiny Committee gave detailed consideration to the list of proposals and concerns were expressed regarding the impact of some proposals on staff across the Authority.

Reference was made to the proposed civic meals increase of 5% and in response to Members' queries, clarification was provided on what the increase would mean in monetary terms. The Committee suggested that it would be useful to have examples of price increases against menu options in future years. A Member queried whether the service could be outsourced and Officers confirmed that this model would be considered as part of the Catering Service review.

Detailed discussion took place regarding the proposal to cease the Community Safety Warden Service. Officers provided further information on the CSW roles, including the number of posts, shift patterns and the number on duty at any one time, and the public impact if the service were to be withdrawn, including the effect on public reassurance and the level of support at Council events. Officers outlined the rationale for withdrawing the service and explained that Caerphilly are the only Welsh local authority operating such a service in this manner. Reference was made to the new parking enforcement posts and Officers confirmed CSW staff will have the option to apply for these positions if they wish to do so.

The Committee voiced their support for the retention of the CSW service as a valued asset to the Authority. Concerns were raised regarding the maintenance of enforcement issues if the service were to be withdrawn (such as addressing littering and dog fouling issues), and the Committee were advised that these duties are also covered by a number of Officers within the Environmental Health Enforcement Team.

Following due debate, it was moved and seconded that it be recommended to Cabinet that the CSW service be retained, and that alternative savings be achieved by reducing the number of Cabinet posts from 9 to 5 (by realigning the directorate portfolios) and implementing park and ride car park charges.

An amendment to the motion was moved and seconded in that it be recommended to Cabinet that the CSW service be retained. By a show of hands, and in noting there were 2 against, this was agreed by the majority present. This became the substantive motion and by a show of hands and in noting there was 1 abstention, was agreed by the majority present.

It was then moved and seconded that park and ride car park charges be recommended to Cabinet for implementation as an alternative saving to cessation of the CSW service. By a show of hands and in noting there was 1 abstention, this was agreed by the majority present.

The Committee discussed the proposal to provide the Meals Direct Service to Section 117 clients only (ceasing service to all other clients). They expressed concerns regarding the number of posts that would be lost through the proposal, and commented on the value of the service to those in need, particularly vulnerable groups of people. Following due debate, it was moved and seconded that it be recommended to Cabinet that the service be retained, and by a show of hands and in noting there was 1 abstention, was agreed by the majority present.

The Committee discussed the proposal to introduce a £20 charge for rat treatments and sought clarification on the rationale for introducing the charge. Officers explained that this is another discretionary area and that charges vary across other local authorities where such a service exists. The Committee were asked to note that the Council does not have a duty to keep private land from infestation, and that the charge is a contribution towards the overall cost of the service. A means-tested discount of 50% will be available. Concerns were raised that the charge will cause an increase in the rat population but Members were advised that there is no evidence of this across the 5 local authorities that do not provide a rat treatment service. Following due debate, it was moved and seconded that it be recommended to Cabinet that the charge not be introduced and by a show of hands and in noting there was 1 abstention, was agreed by the majority present.

Appendix 4 - Community and Leisure Services 2019/20 draft savings proposals and MTFP proformas

Further to their earlier declarations, Councillors R.W. Gough, Mrs P. Leonard, J. Ridgewell, T.J. Williams and W. Williams declared a prejudicial interest at this point and left the meeting during consideration of the proposals relating to community centres.

The Scrutiny Committee discussed the proposals relating to the reduction of caretaker support across community centres, and Officers explained that this will entail a transitional period, with 1 hour for now and then further savings (equating to part-year) from October 2019.

Concerns were expressed surrounding the proposal to close 2 civic amenity sites, and Members felt it would not be conducive to discuss this proposal until the findings of the Waste Review Group are brought to the Committee in February 2019. Members were advised that based on the work carried out by the Group to date to examine the work-streams, it is likely that the closure of 2 sites will be recommended in the Review.

The Committee discussed the proposal to remove one application of the weed spraying contract and concerns were raised about the negative impact this could have on the landscape of the authority. Officers referred to the similar reduction that had been made across the grass cutting regime and emphasised the need to make savings moving forward.

Members expressed concerns regarding the proposal to close all 5 public conveniences

and the impact this would have on residents. They asked whether this could be withdrawn pending receipt of the consultation results on the Draft Local Toilets Strategy, which had been discussed by the Committee the previous week. Officers reiterated the need to make savings and explained that although the high public impact has been acknowledged, this is a discretionary service and the Council does not have a duty to provide public toilets.

Appendix 5 - Infrastructure 2019/20 draft savings proposals and MTFP proformas

The Committee discussed the proposals to reduce budgets for carriageway resurfacing/surface dressing and highways reactive maintenance. Members expressed concerns regarding road conditions across the Authority and the lifespan of existing resurfacing treatments. Officers outlined efforts to maximise the budget across the highways network. Clarification was sought on the reasons for sinking roads in Bargoed Town Centre and it was explained that these are due to underlying issues such as drainpipes, construction and topography characteristics. Such works are subject to a maintenance period of 12 months and can be also rectified if these are caused by a latent defect.

Concerns were also raised that these reductions could have cumulative effects on the condition of the road network and could lead to increased repair costs in future years. Officers explained that they are making concerted efforts to maximise grant funding (reductions for which have had an increasing impact over the years on back office staffing, planned maintenance and reactive maintenance). The Council are lobbying WG to mitigate funding losses but there are no guarantees this will be successful.

Discussion took place regarding pothole intervention criteria and a query was received regarding the number of insurance claims – Officers confirmed they would arrange to circulate this information to Members following the meeting.

Officers responded to queries in respect of gully cleaning and intervention criteria in the event of blockages, with it explained that it is intended to undertake a more targeted approach to these potential issues in high risk areas.

Queries were received on street lighting maintenance, and Members were referred to the Future Lighting and Energy Savings report recently considered by the Scrutiny Committee and approved by Cabinet, which will see LED conversion of all columns utilising a SALIX interest-free loan.

A Member queried whether a charge could be placed on contractors arising from road wear and tear caused in the vicinity of construction areas, and Officers confirmed that the Council does not have the power to levy such charges if vehicles are using the road for its intended purpose.

Appendix 6 – Regeneration and Planning 2019/20 draft savings proposals and MTFP proformas

No queries were received regarding this section of the draft savings proposals and the Committee raised no objections regarding these proposals.

Appendix 7 – Communities Directorate 2019/20 “temporary” savings

These proposals were unanimously supported by the Committee.

Appendix 8 – Equalities Impact Assessments

The Committee noted the details of the Equalities Impact Assessment for each proposed saving that will have a public impact.

Having fully considered the report and provided their comments as part of the consultation process, the Scrutiny Committee noted the details of the draft budget proposals for 2019/20 across the Authority and those applicable to the Communities Directorate. They were generally supportive of the proposals contained in Appendix 1, Appendix 2 (nil impact only) and Appendix 7 of the report and raised no objections regarding the majority of the proposals listed within Appendices 3 to 6. The Committee requested that their comments and concerns raised throughout the course of the meeting on a number of the individual savings proposals be highlighted to Cabinet as part of the consultation process.

Members thanked the Officers in attendance for their presentations and for responding to the queries raised during the course of the meeting.

The meeting closed at 6.30 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 26th March 2019, they were signed by the Chair.

CHAIR