



CABINET

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, TREDOMEN ON WEDNESDAY, 29TH JANUARY 2020 AT 10.30 A.M.

PRESENT:

Councillor P. Marsden - Chair

Councillors:

C. Cuss (Social Care and Well Being), N. George (Environment and Neighbourhood Services), C.J. Gordon (Corporate Services), Mrs B. Jones (Education and Achievement) S. Morgan (Regeneration, Transportation and Sustainability), L. Phipps (Homes, Places and Tourism) and E. Stenner (Finance, Performance and Planning).

Together with:

C. HARRY (Interim Chief Executive)

Also in Attendance:

J. Carpenter (Finance Manager (Revenues)), A. Dallimore (Regeneration Services Manager), S. Harris (Interim Head of Business Improvement Services and Acting S151 Officer), R. Tranter (Head of Legal Services and Monitoring Officer) and C. Evans (Committee Services Officer).

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for Absence were received from M.S. Williams (Interim Corporate Director – Communities), R. Edmunds (Corporate Director – Education and Corporate Services) and D. Street (Corporate Director – Social Services and Housing).

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor S. Morgan declared a personal and prejudicial interest and left the meeting on Agenda Item 7- To Determine a Specific Discretionary Rate Relief Scheme in Respect of Welsh Government (WG) 2019/20 Grant Funding as an owner of commercial premises whose tenant may benefit from the scheme.

3. CABINET – 15TH JANUARY 2020

RESOLVED that subject to it being noted that Item 5 – Waste and Recycling Collection Systems (Page 3) should state that the Labour manifesto made a commitment to maintain the current green and brown bin collection system, the minutes were approved as a correct record.

4. CABINET FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME – TO NOTE

Cabinet were provided with the Cabinet Forward Work Programme, which detailed the scheduled reports from 15th January 2020 to 10th June 2020. Members were reminded that the Cabinet Forward Work Programme is a working document and therefore subject to change.

The Interim Chief Executive advised Cabinet that the Corporate Volunteering and Community Sport reports, scheduled for 29th January 2020 have been deferred to a further meeting, date is to be scheduled shortly. In addition, it was noted that a Housing Revenue Account Charges report has been scheduled for the 12th February 2020.

Following consideration and discussion, it was moved and seconded that the Forward Work Programme be noted. By a show of hands this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that subject to the aforementioned amendment, the Cabinet Forward Work Programme be noted.

MATTERS ON WHICH EXECUTIVE DECISIONS WERE REQUIRED

5. UPDATE ON RESERVES

The report, which was considered by the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee on 14th January 2020 provided details of the usable reserves held by the Authority. Cabinet were provided with the audited balances as at the 1st April 2019 along with updated balances reflecting in-year adjustments to date for the 2019/20 financial year. The report also provided details of balances that are available for the one-off funding of capital schemes.

It was noted that the Authority's usable reserves totalled £118.524m as at the 1st April 2019, this is based on an assessment of in-year adjustments to date the current balance on usable reserves is £119.041m. The report included detailed commentary of balances held.

Cabinet thanked the Officer for the detailed report and discussion ensued.

A Member, in noting the figures within the report, expressed their concerns for a number of inaccuracies that had been reported in the press, which may have mislead members of the public into thinking that there are more funds available in reserves. Officers provided Cabinet with an explanation on the 3 types of reserves; non-cashback reserves, useable and Capital Programme reserves. It was noted that there are a reserves which have been earmarked, but not yet utilised, due to project timescales such as Band B 21st Century Schools Projects and Wales Housing Quality Standard (WHQS). A further report will be provided later in the year, which will identify investments.

Discussions took place around the Band B 21st Century Schools Programme and it was noted that, as a result of the current robust financial management, the programme can secure up to £12.5million in match-funding from Welsh Government. This can be obtained through the use of reserves which ultimately reduce costs and there would be no need for borrowing in order to deliver on the programme. It was noted that the business case is currently being developed.

Cabinet discussed further projects such as the Regeneration opportunities and grant schemes, as well as the WHQS and 21st Century Schools, all of which provide investment and improvements into communities, in schools, homes and environment. It was noted that a holistic approach has been applied in order to maximise funding streams and provide the most community benefit in each investment.

Following consideration and discussion, it was moved and seconded that the recommendations in the report be approved. By a show of hands this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that for the reasons contained in the Officer's Report that funding totalling £24.543m (Capital Earmarked Reserves £21.107m and Council Tax Reduction Scheme £3.436m) should be set aside pending the preparations of a report during the spring that will outline proposals to utilise this sum for investments in the Council's 'place shaping' agenda.

6. TARGETED REGENERATION INVESTMENT THEMATIC GRANT

The report informed Cabinet of Welsh Government's Targeted Investment Urban Centre Property/Living Enhancements thematic grant programme, and sought delegated powers for the Council's Regeneration Project Board to make decisions on grant awards of up to £250,000 under this programme. The report also sought an allocation towards the overall management fees associated with the programme.

Welsh Government's (WG) flagship regeneration programme is the Targeted Regeneration Investment programme. In total £44 million has been ring-fenced to develop projects in targeted urban areas.

It was noted that £10 million has been top sliced from this budget to instigate an urban centres property enhancement grant programme. Each local authority will receive £920,000 to offer grants to improve buildings in town centres. As WG has recognised Caerphilly as one of its five key towns in the city deal area the focus of the overall Targeted Regeneration Investment (TRI) programme will be Caerphilly Town and thematic grant programme will therefore focus its attention on bringing both commercial and residential properties back into beneficial use.

The report outlined the grant programme in more detail and also requested that decision on grant awards can be delegated to the Regeneration Project Board. It also recognises the human resource requirement to manage the programme effectively and calls for additional financial resources to cover the costs associated with the necessary support services.

Cabinet thanked the Officers for the report and discussion ensued.

A Member queried whether consultation had been undertaken with local businesses within the area. Officers explained that feedback had been very positive as a result of the larger grants being made available, however, whilst the criteria and application process can be a little onerous, the level of available grant will encourage people to apply, and there are currently a number of property owners completing the application process at present.

Discussions took place around staffing to manage the process and concerns were raised that there may not be sufficient staff in place to manage and oversee the process. Officers explained that whilst there is a resource constraint, new staff have recently been employed within the department, whom as part of their role will include the management of promotion of such projects.

Clarification was sought on the funding for the scheme and it was noted that there is a 70% contribution from Welsh Government, along with a 30% input from private property owners. Members were assured that whilst there is no funding provided by the Authority, support services will be provided to the applicants from the staff in the Regeneration Team. Further assurance was provided that due diligence will also be undertaken to ensure that applicants are in an affordable position to undertake the scheme.

A Member, in supporting the scheme queried whether it could be rolled out to commercial estates within the area. Officers explained that the project is aimed at targeting and improving Town Centres, and therefore this will be focus of this particular project.

Following consideration and discussion, it was moved and seconded that the recommendation in the report be approved. By a show of hands this was unanimously agreed.

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

- i) the establishment of the TRI Urban Centre Property/ Living Enhancement thematic grant scheme be noted;
- ii) delegated decision powers be given to the Regeneration Project Board to approve grants of up to £250,000;
- iii) an allocation of £20k from the Council's Regeneration Project Board's Development Fund (Revenue) be approved to cover identified funding gaps associated with the provision of internal professional support fees linked to managing this grants programme.

7. TO DETERMINE A SPECIFIC DISCRETIONARY RATE RELIEF SCHEME IN RESPECT IN WELSH GOVERNMENT (WG) 2019/20 GRANT FUNDING

Councillor S. Morgan declared a personal and prejudicial interest in this item as an owner of commercial premises whose tenant may benefit from the scheme, and left the meeting during its consideration.

The report outlined that the Welsh Government (WG) has made funding available for a discretionary rate relief scheme for the financial year 2019-20 only; this funding is in addition to the WG 'High Street and Retail Rate Relief (HSRRR) Scheme'. Relief granted by the Authority under this discretionary scheme will be met by way of a specific cash-limited grant but, before any relief is awarded, the Authority must determine the details of the scheme.

The report provided details of £221k funding provided by WG for a new discretionary rate relief scheme for 2019-20 only and provides 2 options with a recommendation that the resolution at Appendix 2 be adopted.

Cabinet thanked the Officers for the report and discussion ensued.

A Member queried whether public houses would be subject to the reduction, following an announcement from the Chancellor of the Exchequer, relating to Public Houses in England. Officers explained that there has been no correspondence to suggest that Wales would follow a similar path; however the HSRRR Scheme and the Scheme on offer includes Public Houses.

In recognising the benefits of the scheme, and issues businesses could have for future planning, it was queried whether the scheme will be available for 2020/2021. Officers explained that since writing the report, it has been suggested that the scheme will be made available for 2020/2021. Whilst this is good news for businesses, the team shares the frustration of business owners, with specific issues around future planning.

Discussions took place around the uptake of the scheme. Officers explained that there is an estimated 70-80% take up of the scheme, some national companies are not eligible for the scheme, but are also included in the non-take-figures. Members were assured that Officers access all avenues to encourage take-up, including phone calls to businesses, letters and personal visits.

Cabinet requested additional information be provided in future reports on the businesses currently not taking up the scheme, to provide a clearer understanding and determine whether there are any barriers to take up.

Following consideration and discussion, it was moved and seconded that the recommendations in the report be approved. By a show of hands this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that for the reasons contained in the Officers report that the resolution detailed in Appendix 2 of the report be adopted by the Authority with immediate effect and that the resolution in Appendix 1 not be adopted for the reasons outlined in paragraph 5.3 of the report.

The meeting closed at 11.14am.

Approved and signed as a correct record subject to any corrections made at the meeting held on 12th February 2020.

CHAIR