



SPECIAL REGENERATION AND ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, YSTRAD MYNACH ON
WEDNESDAY, 1ST OCTOBER 2014 AT 5.30 P.M.**

PRESENT:

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

Councillors:

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

Cabinet Members:

K. James (Regeneration, Planning and Sustainable Development), D.V. Poole (Community and Leisure Services) and T.J. Williams (Highways, Transportation and Engineering).

Together with:

S. Aspinall (Acting Deputy Chief Executive), P. Elliott (Head of Regeneration and Planning), P. Griffiths (Principal Planner), P. Hudson (Marketing and Events Manager), I. MacVicar (Group Manager Operations)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors J. Bevan, Mrs A. Blackman, M.J. Prew, A. Rees and Mrs E. Stenner.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillors Mrs E. Aldworth, D.T. Davies, R.T. Davies, C. Elsbury, S. Kent and Mrs D. Price declared an interest in Agenda Item 3 as Community Councillors.

Councillor C. Elsbury declared an interest in Agenda Item 3 (Proforma 8 - Rural Development Programme) in that he has relatives who have received funding from this programme.

As there were no recommendations being determined on these items, Members were not required to leave the meeting room and were able to participate fully in the debate.

REPORTS OF OFFICERS

Consideration was given to the following report.

3. **MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN – SAVINGS FROM REGENERATION AND PLANNING SERVICES – ITEMS FOR CONSIDERATION**

This meeting continued the round of special Scrutiny meetings relating to the budget planning process for 2015/16 and 2016/17. The report, which was presented by Pauline Elliott, Head of Regeneration and Planning, sought Members' comments on the suggested Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) contributions from the Regeneration and Planning division. The report containing a range of proposed savings and efficiencies for this area, in accordance with the Cabinet report of 16th April 2014 ("Next Stages of the MTFP – 2015/16 & 2016/17").

The full range of statutory and discretionary services within the Regeneration and Planning division were outlined within the report, which contained two main proposals for Members' consideration.

The first set of proposals within the report listed savings which could be delivered without the option of redeployment/compulsory redundancies, and whilst maintaining a service across both statutory and discretionary services. Full details of the savings without redundancies were listed within Appendix 1 (Proforma numbers 1-21) and Officers advised of a typing error in 4.2 of the report in that the total savings from these proposals for 2015/2016 should read £622,014 and not £608,014. Within some services, additional savings were also explored for 16/17 onwards.

Proformas 1-4 of the report contained savings proposals within statutory service areas, with potential savings totalling £151,821:-

- (1) Reorganise Building Control and delete 1 Team Leader Post;
- (2) Reorganise Development Management;
- (3) Delete Planning Student/Trainee Planner Post;
- (4) Public Rights of Way - Budget Realignment.

With regards to the restructuring of the Planning area teams detailed within Proforma 2 (Reorganise Development Management), Members queried what would in the event of a significant increase in planning applications and workload. Officers confirmed that in such an eventuality, a business case to request additional resources would be submitted. Members raised concerns that there could be increased expectations placed on volunteer workers as a result of the savings proposed within Proforma 2 (Public Rights of Way), and Officers clarified the remit of work carried out by in-house staff, volunteers and contractors.

Following discussion and consideration of the listed options, Members unanimously endorsed the savings proposals detailed in Proformas 1-4 of Appendix 1 of the report

The remainder of Appendix 1 (Proformas 5-21) contained a list of savings proposals within discretionary service areas.

Proformas 5-10 listed savings proposals within Countryside and Landscape Services, with potential savings for these areas totalling £65,000:-

- (1) Reorganise Ecology Team;
- (2) Environmental/Derelict Land Maintenance – Budget Reduction;
- (3) Country Parks & Countryside Management – Budget Realignment;
- (4) Rural Development Programme (RDP): Reduction in Match Funding - Budget Realignment);
- (5) Sustainable Development Team – Budget Realignment;
- (6) Section 106 Management Payments - Budget Realignment.

Following discussion and consideration of the listed options, Members unanimously endorsed the savings proposals detailed in Proformas 5-10 of Appendix 1 of the report.

Proformas 11-15 listed savings proposals within Art and Tourism venues, with potential savings for these areas totalling £65,000:-

- (1) Theatre and Arts and The Blackwood Miners Institute – Additional income and Budget Realignment;
- (2) Cwmcarn Forest – Additional income and Budget Realignment;
- (3) Winding House – Budget Realignment;
- (4) Visit Caerphilly Centre – Additional income;
- (5) Llancaiach Fawr – Additional Income.

Additional income for Visit Caerphilly for 2016/17 and Llancaiach Fawr for 2016/17 and 2017/18 was also listed. Members referenced the £5000 additional income generated following the recent refurbishment of Blackwood Miners Institute and Officers explained that this income was on top of substantial savings of £52,000 already generated in the past year. It was anticipated that income would increase in the next financial year following an increase in activities within the building. Officers also confirmed that an increase in income from Llancaiach Fawr was anticipated following the refurbishment of the Manor House and wedding facilities.

Following discussion and consideration of the listed options, Members unanimously endorsed the savings proposals detailed in Proformas 11-15 of Appendix 1 of the report. With regards to Proforma 14 (Visit Caerphilly) and Proforma 15 (Llancaiach Fawr), Members requested that it be noted that they were considering and endorsing the savings proposals listed for 2015/16 only.

Proforma 16 of the report proposed the budget realignment of Industrial Properties and Business Centres, totalling £50,000 for 2015/16. Additional income for 2016/17 was also listed. Members unanimously endorsed this savings proposal for 2015/16.

Proforma 17 of the report proposed vacancy management and budget realignment for the Business Support section and Proforma 18 proposed budget realignment for the Urban Renewal section, with £101,000 of potential savings in total. Both these savings proposals were unanimously endorsed by Members.

Proforma 19 of the report proposed vacancy management and budget realignment of Events and Marketing. This entailed the deletion of 1 post and a part-time saving on another post, together with the removal of the Bargoed Ice Rink event, an increase in fees and sponsorship, and a 16% reduction in advertising. Potential savings totalled £109,693.

Detailed discussion ensued regarding the proposal to remove the Bargoed Ice Rink event, with Members concerned that events in other town centres had not been put forward as a savings options. Officers explained that other events such as the Big Cheese involved greater cost to the Authority but also generated a significant amount of income for the local economy, whereas the smaller Bargoed Ice Rink event had a lesser economic impact on the surrounding area. Officers also explained that the Ice Rink was originally intended as a temporary project and that grant funding had been received for the event for the first year.

Members queried whether the financial contribution from Bargoed Town Council and ticket sales from the event had been included in the savings calculations, with it confirmed that the £20,000 was the net saving after all other factors were taken into account.

Following consideration of this proposal, Members requested that consultation be undertaken with Bargoed Town Council regarding the proposed removal of the Bargoed Ice Rink event. It was also requested that information be provided regarding other contributors to CCBC events. The remaining savings options listed within Proforma 19 (totalling £89,693) were unanimously endorsed by Members.

Proforma 20 of the report proposed the budget realignment of EU Funding, with two retirements leading to a redistribution of duties and a saving of £7,500 achievable. This savings proposal was unanimously endorsed by Members.

Proforma 21 of the report proposed the removal of the Area Forum Budget for 2015/16 only. This budget is used to fund environmental schemes throughout the County Borough to add value to schemes promoted by community groups, with a proportion of the budget allocated to each ward within the Authority. Removing the budget for 2015/16 would save £72,000. It was explained that some wards spend their allocation regularly, but others allow their allocation to build up over a period of time, and subsequently this has resulted in a reserve of £162,000.

Detailed discussion of this proposal ensued and Officers confirmed that an event had recently been held to promote community awareness of the budget. Members raised concerns that if the budget was removed for 2015/16, it might not be reinstated the following year, and thus communities could lose a valuable source of funding for environmental schemes. Discussion also took place with regards to the funding amount held in reserve.

Members were unable to endorse this proposal as it was felt that further clarification was needed, with further information subsequently requested regarding the Area Forum Budget, including the amount held in reserve.

Members then considered the second set of the proposals within the report, which listed the net costs of all discretionary services and listed the savings which could be delivered via reduction or removal of the service, subsequently resulting in staff redeployment or redundancies. The total savings achievable from such reduction or removal of these discretionary services amounted to £3,554,205. The impact of these proposals, including savings, implementation costs, timeframes, risks, and employment effects, together with a number of other issues, were also explained in detail in each of the proposed cases.

Where possible, alternatives to total removal of the services were included in the report. The report also outlined instances where it would either be impractical to completely close a service or where it would be technically possible but the penalties (such as grant repayments and legal responsibilities) would negate any savings achieved for a considerable period. Full details of these savings were listed within Appendix 2 of the report (Proforma numbers 1-12).

Proforma 1 of the report proposed the full deletion of the Urban Renewal service, which would bring about an achievable saving of £222,514. Members raised concerns with regards to the effect this could have on funding schemes and regeneration projects in towns and villages. Following consideration of the proposal, Members unanimously agreed that this savings option could not be endorsed and that the Urban Renewal service should be retained.

Proforma 2 of the report proposed the deletion of the Town Centre Management Team, which would bring about a saving of £115,994. Members queried whether all the information associated with this savings option had been reflected in the report, citing town centre vacancies and footfall figures as examples. Officers reiterated that the aim of the meeting was to seek Members' views on the suggested savings, and that further information would be provided subject to definitive proposals emerging later in 2014 for consideration at that time.

Following consideration of the proposal, Members unanimously agreed that this savings option could not be endorsed and that the Town Centre Management service should be retained.

Proforma 3 of the report proposed the deletion of the Business Support team and service, with an achievable saving of £483,638. Members spoke in support of the work carried out by the team, and in particular their role in Business Grants and Social Enterprise Schemes. Following consideration of the proposal, Members unanimously agreed that they could not endorse this savings option and that the Business Support team should be retained.

Proforma 4 of the report proposed the full deletion of the Events and Marketing service, with an achievable saving of £482,638. Members spoke of the positive impact that the service had on tourism in the county borough. The proforma listed a number of events within the borough and Members requested that Bargoed Ice Rink be included in this list. Following consideration of the proposal, Members unanimously agreed that this savings option could not be endorsed and felt that the Events and Marketing service should be retained.

Proforma 5 of the report proposed the full deletion of the Arts Development Service, which would present savings of £143,198 and the full closure of the Blackwood Miners Institute, which would bring about a saving of £297,842. Members spoke in support of the services and subsequently were unable to endorse these savings options, unanimously agreeing that the Arts Development Service should be retained and Blackwood Miners Institute should remain open.

Proforma 6 proposed the full closure of the Visit Caerphilly Centre, which would bring about savings of £88,753. Members spoke of the popularity of the Visitor Centre, and following consideration of the proposal, Members unanimously agreed that this savings option could not be endorsed and supported the retention of the service.

Proforma 7 proposed the full closure of Cwmcarn Forest Drive Visitor Centre, together with significant reductions to the Country Park aspect of the service, which would bring about savings of £280,974. Members discussed the current tree-felling programme in operation and it was confirmed that the public had been made fully aware of the facilities that remained open. Officers confirmed that the Forest Drive itself was run by National Resources Wales and that subsequently the closure of the Drive due to the tree-felling programme would result in no loss of income to the Authority. Members also discussed the impact of car parking charges that had recently been introduced at the site.

Following consideration of the proposal, Members unanimously agreed that they could not endorse this savings options and supported the retention of the service.

Proforma 8 of the report proposed the full closure of the Winding House Museum and Heritage Service and Proforma 9 proposed the full closure of Llancaiach Fawr, which would bring about savings of £665,162 in total. Members spoke in support of these tourist attractions, and following consideration of the proposals, unanimously agreed that they could not endorse these savings options and supported the retention of these services.

Proforma 10 of the report detailed the savings available if the 5 country parks within the report were to close. This would bring about savings of £311,623. The report explained that closure was not a feasible option owing to various legislation, but that the option had been included as country parks are classed as a discretionary service. Following consideration of the proposal, Members unanimously agreed that they could not endorse this savings option and supported the retention of this service.

Proforma 11 of the report proposed the deletion of the Countryside and Landscape support service and Proforma 12 proposed the deletion of the Sustainable Development team, which would bring about savings of £481,848 in total. Members voiced their support for these services and following consideration of the proposals, unanimously agreed that they could not endorse these savings options.

Following completion of these considerations, the Chair thanked Members for their contributions to the meeting.

The meeting closed at 6.57 pm

Approved as a correct record and subject to any amendments or corrections agreed and recorded in the minutes of the meeting held on 28th October 2014 they were signed by the Chair.

CHAIR