



NON-DOMESTIC RATEPAYERS COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS ON MONDAY 18TH JANUARY 2021 AT 5PM

PRESENT:

Councillor J. Pritchard – Chair
Councillor G. Kirby – Vice Chair

Councillor E. Stenner - Cabinet Member for Finance, Performance and Customer Services

Together with:

S. Harris (Head of Financial Services and Section 151 Officer), J. Carpenter (Finance Manager, Revenues), S. Wilcox (Town Centres and Business Development Manager) and E. Sullivan (Senior Committee Services Officer)

ALSO PRESENT REPRESENTING LOCAL BUSINESSES

Mr. D. Ingram and Mr S. Reynolds

1. APOLOGIES

No apologies for absence had been received.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

3. MINUTES – 15TH JANUARY 2020

The minutes of the meeting held on the 15th January 2020 were moved and seconded as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

4. TO MEET REPRESENTATIVES OF NON-DOMESTIC RATE PAYERS TO DISCUSS MATTERS RELATING TO THE BUDGET 2020/21

The meeting had been convened in accordance with Section 65 of the Local Government Act 1992 to consult representatives of non-domestic ratepayers on the Council's draft revenue budget proposals for 2021/22.

The Head of Financial Services and Section 151 Officer advised that as part of the consultation process on the Draft Budget 2021/2022 the views of Non-Domestic Ratepayers were being sought prior the final report being presented to Cabinet and Council for approval.

The Section 151 Officer explained that this process normally happened much earlier in the year but unfortunately the Local Government Financial Settlement had not been received from Welsh Government until the 22nd December 2020, so Officers had only a few weeks to put final proposals together ready for consultation.

The budget proposals were outlined, and the Officer confirmed that there would be a 3.1% uplift in Welsh Government funding for Caerphilly County Borough Council together with a proposed 3.9% increase in Council Tax.

It was noted that 3 tranches of COVID-19 Business Grants had already been rolled out by the Local Authority and Officers confirmed that there was still a high level of uncertainty on the continuation of any grant funding and what form any such funding would take going forward. Officers reminded those present that the Council acts solely as an agent in these matters and as such had to wait on Welsh Government for further detail.

Reference was made to various areas of budgetary pressure including Social Care and Education and the Officer outlined the funding requirements for each. It was noted that further investment would be made in relation to the Caerphilly Cares initiative and the Community Empowerment Fund.

The Section 151 Officer confirmed that the financial impact of COVID-19 would in all probability carry forward into 2022/23 and beyond. Furthermore, there was still a great deal of uncertainty in relation to Brexit so the Council's Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) would be kept under close review. He also confirmed that the Council would continue to lobby Welsh Government regarding funding shortfalls.

The Chair thanked the Officer for this summary and questions were welcomed.

Mr Reynolds queried whether there would be any leeway in terms of rate collection, for example could struggling businesses stop payments for 1 or 2 months to give them time to reassess their position and mitigate any further changes to their operations. Officers confirmed that it was possible to re-profile payments on a case-by-case basis.

A query was then raised on Small Business Rate Relief levels and if Caerphilly were in line with the rest of the UK. The Officer confirmed that he hadn't heard any detail on this at the moment and advised that rateable values were higher in England than in Wales.

Mr Ingram from a cinema operating perspective detailed the impact on his business as a result of COVID-19 regulations, particularly maintaining social distancing in a theatre/seating set-up and wondered if Welsh Government would look at this specific business rate separately. He also queried if Caerphilly had any plans to encourage people back to the high street.

Officers acknowledged the difficulties faced by specific business sectors and the Council did appreciate how difficult it had been for businesses. In relation to encouraging people back to the High Street, the Cabinet Member confirmed that the Free Car Parking offer in Town Centres would continue to try and assist local businesses. Elected Members,

Officers and Members of the Cabinet were lobbying hard with Welsh Government to push for additional funding.

Officers referred to grants available to help businesses with social distancing requirements and highlighted money available via a Capital Assistance Grant which needed to be spent by the end of March. He confirmed that similar grants were available for smaller village centres to cope with social distancing requirements.

Mr Ingram provided further detail on the impact on cinema entertainment and wished that programmes such as the 'eat out and help out' had also be pioneered to support theatres and cinemas from the noticeable impact of COVID-19.

Reference was then made to pedestrianisation of town centres and the wider use of pavements in order to support eating outdoors and both Business Representatives confirmed that they felt the message of free carparking was coming through and placed on record their thanks to Public Health, Health and Safety Officers and Town Centre Officers for all their help with the various regulations and restrictions.

The Chair thanked everyone for attending and closed the meeting.

Meeting closed at 17:40pm

Approved as a correct record and subject to any amendments or corrections agreed and recorded in the minutes of the meeting held on 2nd February 2022 they were signed by the Chair.

CHAIR