



## **DRAFT BUDGET PROPOSALS FOR 2023/24 FEEDBACK FROM CAERPHILLY UNISON**

Caerphilly Unison has now had the opportunity to consider and take the views of our membership on the Draft Budget Proposals for 2023/24 and would offer the following comments:

The cost pressures being faced by Caerphilly county borough council are significant but sadly not uncommon across the public sector in Wales and UK. The increasing rate of inflation, energy costs and the price of goods is clearly a position which is unsustainable for many public sector organisations, and without immediate investment from the UK Government will see a decline in our services and the health and well-being of communities the likes of which we have not seen before.

We agree that the Local Authority cannot move forward with a 'salami slice' approach to managing the situation we have before us.

We welcome the additional funding of 6.9% from the Welsh Government but must add that in real terms this is well below the current rate of inflation (10.7% - HM Treasury Nov 2022).

Section 5.3.4 of the report refers to 5% being assumed for April 2023 for the NJC pay award. It is important to note that the recognised NJC trade unions have recently submitted a claim to the Employers side asking for RPI + 2% (12.7%). We believe this is a fair and realistic pay claim given the current financial climate.

Section 5.7.5 of the report refers to '*a new relationship will need to be built with staff and communities.*' UNISON would ask for further clarification on what is meant by this statement.

Section 5.7.13 (1) of the report refers to '*undertake a strategic review of support services across all services to create multi-disciplined roles serving the whole organisation.*' Again, UNISON would ask for further clarification on what is meant by this statement.

Section 5.7.13 (2) of the report refers to '*annual financial targets will be provided to each Corporate Director and respective Head of Service to help frame the overall requirement.*' We are unclear how this approach will be different to that of 'salami slicing', a strategy which the report has already chosen not to employ. Many years of falling budgets have seen Directors and Head of Service given a percentage saving figure to achieve. We are unclear how this approach would deliver different outcomes.

This section of the report refers to a number of '*areas for review.*' UNISON would ask for clarification on why these areas have been selected and what are the desired outcomes.

In Section 9 of the report, the Local authority has chosen to continue its approach of not filling vacant posts. Whilst we appreciate that this is a more favourable approach than compulsory redundancy, UNISON have been given assurances from the Chief Executive that the Authority would be looking to put '*more boots on the ground.*' Accordingly, we are keen to explore this

statement further with the Corporate management team and understand where vacancies are not filled the impact that this will have on remaining staff in terms of workload, expectations and wellbeing.

Section 9.2 of the report refers to the Trade Unions being '*fully engaged in proposals to reshape services moving forward*'. UNISON would welcome this as concerns have been raised with the Chief Executive and Leader with regards to the approach taken on methods of consultation with the trade unions in this respect.

Unfortunately, UNISON has not had the opportunity to meet with Directors and/or Heads of Services to discuss the budget proposals prior to public consultation and therefore there are multiple areas within the Draft Budget Report that we would ask for further clarification on, in particular around:

- Cost associated to annual leave
- Areas of budget re-alignment
- Areas of vacancy management and the deletion of posts
- The creation of additional posts
- Reduction in mileage budgets

UNISON would also like to highlight the considerable cost savings of approximately £266k from mileage budgets. While this is positive for the Local authority, we would seek to understand how these savings have been arrived at and would hope that such savings have not merely been transferred on to the shoulders of staff to bear.

Specific comments have also been received from our membership concerning the impact of raising Council tax to 7.9% and the way in which information is presented to the public for consultation. It has been suggested that the Local Authority may wish to consider including the following in future public consultations:

- Provide a data table showing total budget allocations across Directorates and Services (Revenue and Capital);
- Show and explain the impacts of efficiency savings and the wider community impacts;
- Explain what and why reserves are being held back;
- Attach an Organisation Chart to show the diversity and complexity of our services;
- Highlight pay and remuneration across the different Directorates and service staffing levels;
- Structure the finance information tables in a logical order for easier understanding;
- Guidance for improvements previously communicated by the Council Regulators;
- Explain how proposals align with service/public needs;
- Explain how proposals align with current published Manifestos, Strategies, Priorities etc.;
- Feedback from staff and trade unions to address service delivery needs and concerns;
- Show commitments to address known service transformation, corporate/service reviews;
- Show how proposals align and impact on the Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015 – goals;
- Show the strategic risks faced by the Council, and
- Offer a clear structure and building blocks of information.

As always, UNISON is happy to discuss any aspect of our feedback.

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