



POLICY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD IN PENALLTA HOUSE AND VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS ON TUESDAY 21ST FEBRUARY 2023 AT 5.30 P.M.

PRESENT:

Councillor G. Johnston – Chair
Councillor B. Miles – Vice Chair

Councillors:

M. Adams, Mrs. E.M. Aldworth, C. Cuss, G. Enright, D. Ingram-Jones, C.P. Mann, A. McConnell, J. Reed, J. Taylor, C. Thomas, L. G. Whittle, and C. Wright.

Cabinet Members:

Councillors N. George, and Mrs. E. Stenner.

Together with:

Officers: R. Edmunds (Corporate Director of Education and Corporate Services), S. Harris (Head of Financial Services and S151 Officer), M. Jacques (Scrutiny Officer), and J. Lloyd (Committee Services Officer).

Also in attendance: Councillors P. Leonard, C. Morgan, S. Morgan, and J. Pritchard.

RECORDING ARRANGEMENTS

The Chair reminded those present that the meeting was being live-streamed and a recording would be made available to view via the Council's website, except for discussions involving confidential or exempt items. [Click Here to View](#).

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies received from Councillors D. Preece and A. Whitcombe.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

3. MINUTES – 23RD JANUARY 2023

It was moved and seconded that the minutes of the meeting held on 23rd January 2023 be approved as a correct record and by way of Microsoft Forms (and in noting there were 12 for, 0 against, and 2 abstentions) this was agreed by the majority present.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee held on 23rd January 2023 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

4. CALL-IN PROCEDURE

There had been no matters referred to the Scrutiny Committee in accordance with the call-in procedure.

5. POLICY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Scrutiny Officer presented the report which outlined the reports planned for the period February 2023 to March 2023 and included all reports that were identified at the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee meeting held on Monday 23rd January 2023. Members were asked to consider the Forward Work Programme, alongside the Cabinet Forward Work Programme, prior to publication on the Council's website.

Following consideration of the report, it was moved and seconded that the recommendations be approved. By way of Microsoft Forms, this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme be published on the Council's website.

6. CABINET REPORTS

There had been no requests for any of the Cabinet reports to be brought forward for discussion at the meeting.

REPORTS OF OFFICERS

Consideration was given to the following reports.

7. WHOLE-AUTHORITY REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING REPORT (MONTH 9).

Cabinet Member Councillor Mrs. E. Stenner introduced the report which provided details to Members of the 2022/23 projected revenue budget outturn position based on information available as at month 9 of the current financial year. Commentary was also provided throughout the report on the more significant variations against budget.

A Member requested an update on the recruitment of Community Safety Wardens and also queried the costs of bed and breakfast placements, and the possibility of CCBC running their own bed and breakfast premises. Members were advised that the query in relation to the Community Safety Wardens would be forwarded to the Head of Public Protection, Community and Leisure Services to provide a response to Members following the meeting. Members were also advised that the costs of bed and breakfasts were expected to increase in the short term, with provisions being made for this in the budget, and would forward the query in relation to

CCBC providing their own, to the Head of Housing to provide a response to Members following the meeting.

A Member sought clarification on the overspend by Caerphilly Adventures, due to lack of income. Members were advised that this query would be referred to the relevant Head of Service to provide information to Members following the meeting.

Discussion followed in relation to the absence of some appropriate Officers at the meeting. Members were advised that, in future, they may wish to raise questions prior to the meeting, in order to ensure the relevant Officers are in attendance to answer Members questions during the meeting.

A Member sought clarification on the underspend for free school meals, and the effect on homelessness by the Renting Homes Wales Act. Members were advised that the underspend on free school meals related to additional funding transferred into the Financial Settlement against which there are currently no commitments. It was also confirmed that demand for free school meals was being met. The query in relation to homelessness would be referred to the Head of Housing to respond to Members following the meeting.

A Member queried the underspend on the vulnerable learners' referral unit, which is not yet completed. Members were advised that the expansion of the Glan y nant Pupil Referral Unit had been delayed due to contractor work and securing contracts.

A Member sought clarification on the Community Safety Warden vacancies, which were causing an underspend, and noted that the posts had not been advertised. Members were advised that there had been difficulties with recruitment for numerous vacancies and Members were reminded that there has been recent approval for a new recruitment team within the authority.

A Member queried the underspend in Adult Services and requested an update on day care services. Members were advised that the review of day care services is due to be referred to the Social Services Scrutiny Committee. The Member queried the overspend on parks and playing fields and sought clarification as to whether this was as a result of significant budget cuts in recent years, and whether these circumstances were reviewed as part of the budget setting process. Members were advised that there is a robust process of review in place which involves the Cabinet Members, Heads of Service, Finance Managers, and the Chief Executive, and this has been utilised in order to produce the 2023/24 draft budget proposals.

A Member wished to note the investment income detailed as a positive aspect within the report, and also queried the improvement and implementation of savings solutions in the report. Members were advised that any proposals would be shared to the relevant scrutiny committees, together with detailed budget monitoring reports that would be provided to Members.

A Member sought clarification on the underspend within the HR team due to vacancies, and the effect this was having on filling other vacancies within the authority. The Member queried the current number of staff within the HR team, the number of vacancies, and where the vacancies were being advertised. Members were advised that approximately 60 employees currently under the HR team, which includes payroll, health and safety and communications. Vacancies are currently advertised on CCBC website, and social media sites, such as LinkedIn and Facebook.

The Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee noted the content of the report.

8. UPDATE ON RESERVES.

Cabinet Member Councillor Mrs. E. Stenner introduced the report which provided Members with details of the useable reserves held by the Authority. Details were provided of the audited balances as at the 1st April 2022, along with updates to reflect in-year movements in some areas.

A Member queried whether there had been any draft forecasting for April 2023 for the balance on useable reserves. Members were advised that it is proposed in future to present the update on reserves report in June/July each year to ensure that Members have up-to-date information. It was stressed however, that the balances would not have been audited at that time.

A Member sought clarification on the balance on the wellbeing and place-shaping programme reserve detailed in the report and the Head of Financial Services and S151 Officer confirmed that the correct figure was £25.1 million. The Member also queried the residual balance of £18.3 million in capital reserves and requested more specific detail on these numbers within the report. The Head of Financial Services and S151 Officer provided details of elements of this balance and also advised Members that capital budget monitoring reports would be produced over a 3-year period in future to give Members more detail on the profile of spending.

A Member queried when the insurance reserves were last accessed. Members were advised that the authority settles claims on a regular basis and the authority's insurance premium is approximately £1m per annum. The Member also queried the 'fixed-term' posts within Corporate Services and the reserves held of £1.6m. Members were advised that this sum covers a range of posts across a number of service areas and that in some cases the posts were funded for more than one year.

A Member queried why a reserve was still held for insurance with Municipal Mutual. The Head of Financial Services and S151 Officer explained that there are still outstanding historic claims and that the Authority is part of a formal arrangement to fund the settlement of these claims. The Member also sought clarification on IT reserves which totalled over £5m. Members were advised that this covered staff, licensing, migration to the cloud, reviewing the infrastructure network, and implementing the changes.

A Member sought clarification on the PFI reserve of £7.7m for schools, and Members were advised that a report was due to be presented to Joint Scrutiny (Policy and Resources and Education) the following week regarding the proposed voluntary termination of the schools PFI contract. Members were also advised that if this was agreed, then the PFI reserves would be used towards the costs of terminating the contracts.

In response to a question from a Member, the Head of Financial Services also confirmed that the Update on Reserves report includes full details of the reserves totalling circa £15 million that are proposed to be released to support the 2023/24 budget.

The Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee noted the content of the report.

The meeting closed at 6.16 pm.

Approved as a correct record and subject to any amendments or corrections agreed and recorded in the minutes of the meeting held on 4th April 2023, they were signed by the Chair.

CHAIR