



VOLUNTARY SECTOR LIAISON COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MULTI-LOCATIONAL SPECIAL MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE AND VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS ON TUESDAY, 6TH FEBRUARY 2024 AT 10.30 A.M.

PRESENT:

Chair – Mrs L. Jones (Menter Caerfilli)
Vice Chair – Councillor M. Chacon-Dawson

Councillors:

R. Chapman, C. Gordon, T. Heron, Mrs T. Parry, D. W. R. Preece, H. Pritchard, S. Williams and W. Williams.

Together with:

Representatives of the Voluntary Sector: S. Tiley (GAVO), A. Palmer (GAVO), G. Jones (GAVO), K. Dawson (GAVO), S. Ellington (Caerphilly and Blaenau Gwent Citizens Advice), K. Stevenson (Groundwork Wales), R. Evans (Oakdale Community Centre), L. Chapman (Parent Network), J. Wade (The United Reformed Church) and J.A. Pritchard (The Youth Centre, Cefn Hengoed).

Also in attendance:

K. Peters (Corporate Policy Manager), H. Delonnette (Senior Policy Officer), S. Harris (Head of Financial Services and S151 Officer), L. Sykes (Deputy Head of Financial Services and S151 Officer) and S. Hughes (Committee Services Officer).

RECORDING ARRANGEMENTS

The Chair reminded those present that the meeting would be live-streamed and a recording 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 for absence were received from Councillors P. Cook, J. E. Fussell, J. Jones, D. Price, Mrs E. Stenner and L. G. Whittle.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor J.A. Pritchard (in her capacity as a representative of the Voluntary Sector) declared a personal interest in Agenda Item 3 – Draft Budget Proposals for 2024/25, in that she is Treasurer of the Youth Centre, Cefn Hengoed. As this was a personal interest only there was no requirement for her to leave the meeting and she took full part in the debate. Details are also minuted with the respective item.

3. DRAFT BUDGET PROPOSALS FOR 2024/25

During the course of the debate, Councillor J.A. Pritchard (in her capacity as a representative of the Voluntary Sector) declared a personal interest in that she is Treasurer of the Youth Centre, Cefn Hengoed. As this was a personal interest only there was no requirement for her to leave the meeting and she took full part in the debate.

The Head of Financial Services and S151 Officer introduced the report and provided a summary of the draft budget proposals for the 2024/25 financial year. The Voluntary Sector Liaison Committee were asked to consider and comment upon the content of the report prior to final budget proposals being presented to Council on 27th February 2024.

A representative of the Voluntary Sector sought clarification and further information on how the budget cuts will affect community groups and projects. In response, the Head of Financial Services and S151 Officer informed the Committee that the Service Level Agreements with GAVO are protected and that those financial contributions will continue in the 2024/25 financial year. However, it was highlighted that there are some proposals that will impact communities, for example the proposed increase in fees for the use of outdoor sports pitches. It was further highlighted that there are savings proposals on some community projects, such as funding that has previously been used to support the Bargoed Ice Rink and Senghenydd Splash Pad.

Reference was made to the Welsh Government Provisional Local Government Financial Settlement for 2024/25. In response to a query, the Head of Financial Services and S151 Officer clarified that there is no specific funding ringfenced in the Financial Settlement for the Voluntary Sector and that the authority has discretion as to how the funding is allocated across all services.

The Committee was informed of a cut of circa £92m in specific grant funding on an All-Wales basis for 2024/25 and was advised that the details of this are being worked through as there will be an impact on a range of services that rely on this grant funding. The Committee was assured that any impact on the Voluntary Sector would be communicated.

Concerns were raised regarding a number of Councils in England issuing Section 114 Notices in recent years and that it is anticipated a number of other Councils will issue Section 114 Notices moving forward. The Head of Financial Services and S151 Officer explained that a Section 114 Notice effectively means that a Council is unable to deliver a balanced budget. It was highlighted that Councils in Wales are more heavily reliant on Welsh Government support, and although no Section 114 Notices have been issued in Wales, all authorities are facing considerable financial pressures. The Committee was informed that, in terms of Caerphilly County Borough Council, a balanced budget has been delivered by using some of its reserves, but this is not a sustainable approach in the in the long-term. The Head of Financial Services and S151 Officer assured the Committee that Caerphilly County Borough Council was not in position where a Section 114 Notice is being considered.

Clarification and further information were sought regarding the proposal to temporarily fund a number of posts in the Caerphilly Cares Team through grants. It was agreed that the Head of Financial Services and S151 Officer would provide a summary of which grants are supporting the Caerphilly Cares Team subsequent to the meeting.

Reference was made to 100% of the net projected underspend on the Council's 2023/24 revenue budget being transferred into General Fund balances, particularly in relation to the Voluntary Sector. The Head of Financial Services and S151 Officer confirmed that the Grants to the Voluntary Sector budget is ringfenced and that any underspend on the 2023/24 budget will be carried forward to the 2024/25 financial year.

A query was raised regarding the likelihood of receiving more money from Welsh Government and the scope for changing some of the draft savings proposals, particularly in relation to Community Centre caretaking costs. The Committee was advised that there will be some additional consequential funding due to a recent decision made by the UK Government, and that details are awaited from the Welsh Government. It was highlighted that the reduction in the contribution towards caretaking costs (over a period of 3 years) was a decision made by Council last year.

A representative of the Voluntary Sector raised further questions in relation to Community Centres, including how many of the Council's Community Centres have made their increased contribution from October as requested. The opportunity for Community Centres to work with Officers to discuss a long-term review was also raised. Concerns were expressed that the Council is duplicating some of the work undertaken in Community Centres and at a far greater cost than the Voluntary Sector is providing. It was highlighted that this might be an area to create savings without removing the service from local users. The Head of Financial Services and S151 Officer advised the Committee that all the comments will be passed to the relevant Director and Officers, and they will also be captured as part of the budget consultation process.

In conclusion, a Member raised concerns regarding the proposed increase in fees for the use of outdoor sports pitches, which was noted by the Head of Financial Services and Section 151 Officer.

RESOLVED that the Voluntary Sector Liaison Committee considered and commented upon the content of the report prior to Final Budget Proposals being presented to Council on 27th February 2024.

The Chair thanked Members and Officers for their attendance and contributions and the meeting closed at 11.04 am.

Approved as a correct record and subject to any amendments or corrections agreed and recorded in the minutes of the meeting held on 11th July 2024, they were signed by the Chair.

CHAIR