



REGENERATION AND ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, YSTRAD MYNACH ON MONDAY, 1ST DECEMBER 2014 AT 5.30 P.M.

PRESENT:

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

Councillors:

J. Bevan, Mrs A. Blackman, C.J. Cuss, R.T. Davies, Ms J.G. Jones, S. Kent, M. Prew,
Mrs D. Price, A. Rees and Mrs E. Stenner.

Cabinet Members:

K. James (Regeneration, Planning and Sustainable Development) and T.J. Williams
(Highways, Transportation and Engineering).

Together with:

S. Aspinall (Acting Deputy Chief Executive), P. Elliot (Head of Regeneration and Planning),
R. Hartshorn (Head of Public Protection), M.S. Williams (Head of Community & Leisure
Services), T. Shaw (Head of Engineering Services) D. Price (Parks and outdoor facilities
manager), T. White (Waste strategy and operations manager), C. Forbes-Thompson (Scrutiny
Research Officer) and C. Evans (Committee Services Officer)

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors N. Dix, C. Elsbury, R.W. Gough,
Mrs P. Leonard and D. Poole (Cabinet Member for Community and Leisure Service).

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor D.T. Davies declared an interest in Agenda Item 3 Appendix 3, Bargoed Ice Rink
as a Town Councillor for Bargoed.

Councillor Mrs E. Aldworth declared an interest in Agenda Item 3 Appendix 3, Closure of
Bedwas Swimming Pool on Sundays as Bedwas Leisure Centre is within her ward and family
members use the facilities.

REPORTS OF OFFICERS

Consideration was given to the following reports.

3. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN – 2015/2016 SAVINGS FROM ENVIRONMENT DIRECTORATE – ITEMS FOR FURTHER CONSIDERATION.

S. Aspinall, Acting Deputy Chief Executive provided the Scrutiny Committee with a copy of the report presented to Cabinet on 29th October 2014, which updated the Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) following the provisional 2015/16 Local Government Financial Settlement announced by the Welsh Government (WG) on 8th October 2014.

The Scrutiny noted that the report provided details of draft savings for the 2015/16 financial year to allow for a further more focussed period of consultation prior to a final decision in February 2015.

The Scrutiny Committee, to date, have considered a range of MTFP savings options for the Environment Service Division, in relation to discretionary services and efficiency savings for statutory and essential services during meetings between June and October 2014. Many of the savings options were incorporated into the Cabinet report on 29th October along with some additional savings options put forward for consideration since the original Scrutiny Committee Meetings.

Members were asked to consider further and express their views on the MTFP savings options relating to the Environment Directorate, considered by Cabinet on 29th October 2014.

REGENERATION AND PLANNING

Bargoed Ice Rink

Councillor D.T. Davies declared an interest in this item as a Town Councillor for Bargoed.

P. Elliott, Head of Regeneration and Planning, introduced the proposal to cease operating the Bargoed Ice Rink as part of the annual events programme. Members noted that the Scrutiny Committee did not support the proposal on 1st October and further information relating to the events programme was sought and consultation with Bargoed Town Council regarding the proposed was requested.

The Heads of the Valley Grant initially funded the Ice Rink in 2010; however, the Council now largely funds the cost of the event, the net cost of which was £26,000 in 2013/14. Following consultation with Bargoed Town Council, the event was reduced from 9 days to 5 days, to allow the Town Council to assess their funding commitment to the event. However, in addition Officers agreed to monitor the 2014 event and report details back to members in due course.

Members noted that the Ice Rink is staged in a car park in the town, which resulted in a loss of parking and parking income of circa £1,500. Members were assured that other events in the Town Centre during Christmas and the summer would not be affected by this saving option.

The Scrutiny Committee noted the breakdown of total costs and funding of the Events Programme for 2013/14, which referred to the details of funding provided by both the Council and external funding for each event.

Members raised concerns that only Bargoed Town Centre had been targeted for the saving proposals and added that the Town Council may consider increasing their level of investment following the 2014 event.

Officers highlighted that all events were carefully considered and it was noted that the Ice Rink at Bargoed was the least value for money and not cost effective. Following a meeting with the Town Council, Officers added that the Town Council had agreed to review their contribution towards the event, however, were unable to cover the full cost of the event.

Members sought clarification on the total cost of the event and it was noted that the net cost included the contractual costs to erect and remove the Ice Rink and the loss expected in car parking fees. The cost of ticket sales had been deducted from overall costs. In addition, it was noted that the Council is no longer in receipt of EU funding or sponsorship for the event.

Members debated the proposal and it was proposed that, unless alternative funding could be sources to support the ice rink in Bargoed, Members supported the Officers proposal. Upon vote, the majority present supported the proposal.

Area Forum Funding

The proposal to delete the Area Forum Budget was considered by the Regeneration and Environment Scrutiny Committee on 1st October 2014. The Scrutiny Committee were not in support of the proposal and requested further information on the Area Forum Budget including financial values and reserves. The Area Forum Reserve is £162,000, which represents unspent budget allocation from previous years. Community Regeneration holds the Area Forum budget for small environmental schemes identified by the Community Partnerships.

Members noted the proposal to delete the annual Area Forum budget of £72,000 in 2015/2016 and the accompanying allocations summaries in Appendix 2. In addition, Officers highlighted that, although those in receipt of the Fund value the Area Forum Budget, often the annual allocation is rarely entirely spent.

The Chair thanked the Officer for the presentation and invited Members to raise any queries.

Following consideration and discussion, Members unanimously supported the Officers proposal to delete the Area Forum Budget of £72,000 in 2015/16, on the basis that the funding balances be ring fenced to wards and would be reviewed when the remaining balance has been allocated.

PUBLIC PROTECTION

Licensing and Registrars Fees

On the 4th September 2014 the Scrutiny Committee considered and supported the proposals to increase the licensing and registrars fees and were advised that a detailed report on proposed licensing fees for 2015/16 would be submitted to the Licensing Committee and then Council.

Health Improvement Team

The Scrutiny Committee considered the proposal to delete the non-grant funded Health Improvement Officer Post within the Health Improvement Services on 4th September 2014, which was not supported. In October, a 29 page briefing document was sent to the Committee in response to their request for further information to demonstrate the impact of the work of the team on local health issues and challenges.

The report provided the Committee with the requested data to demonstrate the impact of the work of the Team on local health issues and challenges.

The Team consists of 5.4 FTE with 1.8 FTE delivering the Healthy Schools Programme and funded by grant. Since the report to the Special Scrutiny, the 0.6 FTE post and Senior Health Improvement Officer post have become vacant and therefore the revised option is to delete the 1.6 posts saving £77k, with 3.8 FTE posts remaining, 2 FTE non-grant funded and 1.8 FTE grant funded.

Committee Members were advised during the meeting that the Health Improvement Team lead and deliver corporate employee health and wellbeing programmes including health screening for staff.

Following in depth debate, the Scrutiny Committee supported the Officers proposal to delete the non-grant funded vacant Health Improvement Officer Posts (1.6fte) within the Health Improvement Team.

Environmental Health

The report highlighted a new saving proposal to delete a vacant Environmental Health Officer (EHO) post within the Environmental Health Team.

The General Environmental Health Team protects public health and quality of life by dealing with complaints of nuisances or hazards of health e.g. noise, defective drains and sewers, investigation of odours, bonfires etc. They deal with filthy and verminous premises and travellers' sites, and are also involved in problems of pest infestations, straying animals and irresponsible dog ownership. They also enforce in relation to littering, dog fouling and fly tipping activities. The team responds to approximately 15000 requests for service per year. Much of the work undertaken by this team contributes to the Healthier and Greener priorities within the single plan "Caerphilly Delivers". They assist in the provision of better health and healthier lifestyles within our communities. Reducing the 3 EHOs within the General Environmental Health Team to 2 will extend the time taken to deal with and investigate service requests.

Members raised concerns around the increased workload for the staff within the team and the impact on the environment and health.

Following detailed consideration and debate, it was unanimously agreed that Members were not in support of this proposal.

COMMUNITY AND LEISURE SERVICES

Cessation of bands in the park, events programme- New saving

M.S. Williams, Head of Community and Leisure Services provided the Scrutiny Committee with a new saving proposal to cease the Bands in the Park Event Programme, which is hosted within 9 Parks within the Borough and would offer a saving of £2000 for 2015/16 financial year.

Members noted that a few Community Councils, and one partnership have supported the past programmes in the main, these funded 50% of the costs to produce the programme of events in specific locations.

Members debated the item at great depth and discussed various options. It was proposed that, consultation be undertaken with Town and Community Councils for funding to support the events. Upon a vote, the majority present supported the Officers proposal, provided that Town and Community Councils are consulted for funding.

Reduction in Playing Field Maintenance (Additional information required by Scrutiny Committee in July 2014)

Since its consideration by the Scrutiny Committee, Officers considered an alternative option involving cessation of regular pitch marking and handing over pitch marking responsibility to clubs (subject to consultation). The saving would be the same but some pitch renovation could then be undertaken. The clubs would be expected to purchase materials themselves.

Members debated the proposal and sought clarification on the cost of Pitch Marking equipment and level of savings that could be achieved as a result. Upon vote, the Officers proposal was unanimously supported, following consultations with the Clubs.

Increasing Outdoor Facilities Charges (Officers asked to look at other options by Scrutiny in July 2014)

In July 2014, the Scrutiny Committee considered the proposal and Officers were asked to consider the effect of increasing outdoor facilities charges for adults but retaining the existing pricing structure for juniors. Officers have therefore suggested 5 options as follows:

Increase adult fees by:-

- 30%= £20k additional income
- 40%= £27k additional income
- 50%= £31k additional income
- 100%= £69 additional income

Members discussed and debated the proposal and an amendment was proposed that an average increase be applied across all services. The majority present did not support this.

The Officers proposal to increase Outdoor Facilities Charges by 30% was discussed and debated and upon vote, the majority present supported this.

Cessation of Saturday Litter Picking at Various Parks- New Saving Proposal

M.S. Williams provided the Scrutiny Committee with a new proposal to cease litter picking services at 14 Parks within the Borough, which would provide a £12,000 saving contribution in 2015/16.

In addition to the 14 Parks, Members noted that a further 56 Parks within the Borough are only cleansed on a routine weekday.

Following debate, Members unanimously supported the Officers proposal to cease Saturday Litter Picking at various parks, on the proviso that the bins are emptied on Friday.

Removal of Barrier Attendants at 5 Locations- New Saving

The Report provided Members with the option to remove the barrier attendants at 5 locations throughout the borough. The locations were historically established to prevent anti-social behaviour at 5 locations throughout the borough during evenings/ weekends and hours of darkness.

Duties of the attendants include 30 minutes to 1 hour opening and closing the facilities.

The Scrutiny Committee noted that the proposal would provide a saving in staffing costs of £14,000. This would require 5 members of staff to be served with notice of termination of contract of employment.

Members raised concerns around an increase in Anti-Social Behaviour in parks, however, upon vote, the majority present supported the Officers proposals.

Charge for all Replacement/ New Issue Containers (No Concessions)- Not Supported and Additional Information Provided

The Scrutiny Committee considered the proposal to charge for replacement/ new issue containers for 2014/15 and 2015/16 at previous Committees, which were not supported by Members.

Officers highlighted that considerations for methods of payment were required but Members were to note that the proposal offers a potential saving of £60,000. The Committee considered the proposed charges:

Replacement/ new issue bins £25

Replacement/ new issue boxes £6

Replacement/ new issue garden waste bags £3

Where residents request bags for recycling/ waste £5 per roll of 25

Members discussed and debated the proposal and upon vote, the majority present supported the Officers proposal.

Reduced Opening Days and Hours on Civic Amenity (CA) Sites- Original proposal not supported and alternative option considered

The Scrutiny Committee, upon previous consideration had not supported the proposal to close any combination of up to 5 Civic Amenity Sites throughout the Borough, and requested that Officers consider alternative options such as closing all sites on certain days/ times.

It was noted that the provision of one CA site is a statutory requirement, in which legislation requires at least one facility should be available on weekends. Officers highlighted however that the Council aims to keep at least 50% sites open every day.

Officers highlighted that in order to achieve the £100k saving, all sites would be required to close on 2 days per week (on a rotational basis) or, alternatively 1 site could be permanently closed. Closure of less than 6 sites for 2 days/week would not realise the £100k saving that is required.

Concerns were raised that additional security would be required and illicit tipping could be an issue at the sites on the days they are closed, however these are difficult to quantify and Officers highlighted that the issues would probably reduce over time and may be mitigated to some extent by use of CCTV.

Members discussed and debated the proposal and upon vote, the majority present supported the Officers proposal.

Reduced Level of Cleansing on Bank Holidays (Cleansing will be reduced to same level as weekends- limited to morning cleanse of town centres)- New Saving Proposal

The report provided the Scrutiny Committee with a new saving proposal to reduce the level of cleansing on bank holidays in Town Centres during Bank Holidays.

It was noted that this would provide a potential saving of £13,000 in 2015/16.

Members discussed the proposal and upon vote, the Officers proposal was unanimously supported.

Reduction in Cleaning Budget via Reduction in Staff Numbers- New Saving Proposal

The Scrutiny Committee considered a new saving proposal to reduce the cleaning budget through the reduction of cleansing staff across the borough. It was estimated that the proposal would provide a total saving of £300,000 comprising a saving of £100,000 in 2015/16 and a further, additional saving of £200,000 in 2016/17.

The Committee noted that the reduction in staffing levels were in addition to those identified in CA Site reduction (6 number) and an additional 6 to achieve the balance of the Route Optimisation changes introduced in 2014/2015. The reductions would effectively mean circa 15 less personnel on street cleansing which will result in an increase in SLA's for responding

to non-emergency cleansing and missed waste collections from 48 hours to 7 days and the integration of hygiene and nappy collections into fortnightly refuse with the provision of additional containers.

Members raised concerns around the impact on cleanliness of the Borough. Other Authorities have reduced budgets and it has had a noticeable impact on the appearance of their boroughs. Members were advised that the Street cleansing is a statutory function, however the levels of proactive cleansing is very much up to the service provider.

Concerns were raised around the implications on the staff involved. Members were assured that policies are in place within Caerphilly for the consideration of voluntary retirement and a key aim for Caerphilly is to avoid redundancy where possible. Discussions and consultations have not been conducted with the Trade Unions or the Staff within the department.

Having carefully considered the proposal and upon vote, the Officers proposal was not supported by the majority present.

Closure of Bedwas Swimming Pool on Sundays- New Saving

Councillor Elizabeth Aldworth declared an interest in this item as the Leisure Centre is within her ward and family members use the facilities. Councillor Aldworth did not take part in the debate or vote.

The report provided the Scrutiny Committee with a new saving proposal to close Bedwas Swimming Pool during Sundays. Members noted that there are very few customers using the pool on Sundays, which provides little income and high staff and energy costs. The proposal would contribute a saving of £10,000 in 2015/16.

Members debated the proposal and upon vote, the Scrutiny Committee unanimously supported the Officers proposal.

Average Price Increase of 5% + Inflation on Leisure Centre Fees- New Saving

The report provided Members with details of a £100,000 saving proposal in 2015/16, which could be achieved through a 5% price increase on Leisure Centre Fees. Members were assured that the service however, would still provide value for money services at competitive prices.

Following in depth consideration and debate, the Scrutiny Committee unanimously supported this proposal.

ENGINEERING SERVICES

Street Lighting Energy Reduction- New Saving Proposal

T. Shaw, Head of Engineering Service provided the Regeneration and Environment Scrutiny Committee with a new saving proposal, which aims to achieve a part year saving of £100,000 in 2015/16 and a full year saving of £450,000 in 2016/17.

The Committee noted that, in order to achieve the full £450,000 saving during 2016/17, some part night light or switch off could be required to add to the introduction of LED and central management control technology. The new technologies are currently being tested and considered and have recently been introduced to the market place.

Members considered the option and queried alternative options such as dimming the streetlights. Officers explained that the proposal suggests purchasing LED bulbs, which are more energy efficient than the current bulbs, which would be more cost effective in the long term. In addition, Members noted that the new systems have been trialled within the borough and have not been met with any complaints.

Following detailed consideration and discussion of the proposal, the Scrutiny Committee unanimously supported the Officers proposal.

Carriageway Resurfacing – Planned Maintenance – New Proposal

T. Shaw provided the Scrutiny Committee a new proposal to reduce the planned maintenance of carriageways resurfacing within the Borough, and further information to understand the affects of the budget changes, which was requested a previous Scrutiny Committee. Members noted that the proposal would achieve a saving of £300,000 in 2015/16 financial year.

The £300,000 equates to approximately 20% of the current revenue budget allocation. It is assumed that the Capital allocation would at least remain at a similar level to previous years , although a capital bid has been submitted to help mitigate this savings reduction.

It was noted that combined with this approach, 2015/16 would see a decrease in planned carriageway resurfacing works than that experienced over the last 3 years as a result of the completion of the Welsh Government Borrowing initiative (LGBI) Scheme.

The Scrutiny Committee considered this proposal at length and raised concerns over the condition of the highways and the impact on the authority of potential claims. Upon vote, the Officers proposal was unanimously not supported by the Scrutiny Committee.

Footway Resurfacing - Planned Maintenance

The report provided Members with a proposal, which would achieve a saving of £60,000 in 2015/16 through the reduction in planned maintenance on footway resurfacing.

Members noted that the Highways Act provides that the asset (Highway) needs to be maintained in a safe condition for users. A more refined risk rating/prioritisation process could be developed within the HAMP process. This would involve developing the current prioritisation process further to consider additional influencing factors. A review of this process is planned for 2015/16.

The £60,000 equates to approximately 12% of the previous revenue budget allocation. It is assumed that the Capital allocation would at least remain at a similar level to previous years , although a capital bid has been submitted to help mitigate this savings reduction. It was noted that combined with this approach, 2015/16 would see a decrease in planned footway resurfacing works rather than that experienced over the last 3 years as a result of the completion of the Welsh Government Local Government Borrowing Initiative Scheme (LGBI).

The Scrutiny Committee considered this proposal and raised concerns for the risk of insurance claims for personal injury and the cost to the Authority. Upon vote, the Scrutiny Committee unanimously did not support the proposal.

Highway Reactive Maintenance

The Scrutiny Committee was provided with a proposal, which would contribute a £50,000 saving in 2014/15. The Committee noted that the proposal suggested an invest to save option to purchase a Jet Patcher. The new equipment would allow more surface area to be repaired at a lower cost. Thus ensuring that service provision is not compromised.

Following consideration and discussion of the Officers proposal, the Scrutiny Committee unanimously supported the proposal.

Highways Operations – Reduce highway/land drainage planned maintenance budget by 11%

At a previous Scrutiny Committee, the proposal to reduce highway/ land drainage was not supported by the Committee. Members were asked to reconsider the proposal, which would provide savings of £30,000 it was noted that only the highest risk categorisation works would be undertaken. Officers have tried to mitigate the saving proposal by increasing the council's capital funding to this area via a bid.

Members felt that this service area was vital in certain high flood risk areas within the Borough. Officers assured Members that no cuts would be made to the high-risk areas and alternative funding is also being sought.

The Scrutiny Committee, following consideration of the Officers proposal, unanimously supported the proposal.

Winter Maintenance

The Scrutiny Committee considered a new option to reduce the winter maintenance gritting routes, through route optimisation strategies, which would provide a saving of £60,000 in 2014/15.

Members considered the proposal and raised concerns around the implications to the public and Staff. Officers confirmed that there would be minimal impact to staff and that grit bins would be maintained in communities. In addition, Members noted that the hopper equipment to be used would ensure grit is distributed efficiently.

Following detailed debate and discussion, the Scrutiny Committee unanimously supported the Officers proposal.

Highways Operations – Reduce highways reactive maintenance budget by 4%

At a previous Regeneration and Environment Scrutiny Committee, additional information was requested in relation to the longer-term impacts of reducing the highways reactive maintenance budget. It was noted that the proposal would provide a saving of £50,000.

Officers assured the Committee that budgets would require close monitoring to ensure reduction in planned maintenance does not significantly increase reactive maintenance, which could also increase third party claims.

The Scrutiny Committee, following consideration and debate, unanimously supported the Officers proposal.

Structures and Retaining Walls

The Regeneration and Environment Scrutiny Committee previously considered the proposal and requested further information, as a result, this area has been reviewed further and the proposed saving has been reduced to £50,000.

The Committee noted that the risk prioritisation methodology has been further considered and has been deemed appropriate. The review identified that a number of future projects should be defined as "Capital" rather than "Revenue". As such appropriate business cases would be produced to provide substantiation for bids to the Capital Strategy group.

Following consideration and discussion, the Scrutiny Committee unanimously supported this proposal.

Highways Adaptations and Agreements Fees

The Scrutiny Committee noted that the income target for 2014/15 was £151,000, which had been decreased from £165,000 in previous years due to the downturn in the economy affecting the pace of development. The proposal suggested an increase in fees by 10%. The Committee were asked to note that fees were last increased in 2012. Since then there are positive signs that development activity is increasing and all local authorities are reviewing their charges.

The Scrutiny Committee considered and debated the proposal and upon vote, unanimously supported the Officers proposal.

Transport and Engineering – Car Park tariffs. Increase car parking charges by typically 10p per hour.

The Scrutiny Committee considered a proposal to increase car parking charges across the borough by 10p per hour, which would provide a £30,000 saving contribution in the 2015/16 financial year.

Members considered the proposal and noted that similar actions are being considered by other Local Authorities.

Members discussed and debated the proposal and upon vote, the majority present supported the Officers proposal.

Management of Off Street Car Parks (Sunday Charging)

The Scrutiny Committee were provided with a proposal to introduce parking charges in all car parks across the borough on Sundays. It is anticipated that the introduction of the charges would provide a £10,000 saving for the 2015/16 financial year, along with an estimated additional income of £15,000.

Members noted that there are currently 13 Local Authorities currently charging for car parking on Sundays and 2 (Carmarthenshire and Monmouthshire) are currently considering introducing charges on Sundays.

Members considered the proposal and raised queries around the rates to be charged and whether this would include the increase of 10p. Officers confirmed that the rates would be the same on a Saturday and Sunday across the Borough.

Following careful consideration and debate, the Officers proposal was supported by the majority present.

Public Transport Subsidy – Confirmed Option

The report provided Members with a proposal to review the spend and services for Public Transport. The proposal included reviewing contracts with the highest subsidy per passenger, fare paying school buses and consideration of times when usage is lowest, or when a reasonable alternative exists. This would include working with existing service providers to look at where efficiencies in provision can be made, with the minimum impact on passengers. The proposal highlighted a part year saving for 2015/16 of £24,000 and a full year saving of £150,000 in 2016/17.

Members noted that further changes in external funding for bus services (e.g. concessionary travel reimbursement; bus service support grant), may result in additional reduction to bus services in the county borough and the need to re-prioritise how savings can be achieved.

Members discussed the bus service in place in the north of the Borough and the recent cut in the Stagecoach service in the area. Concerns were raised that the proposal would further impact upon the services in the area and have an effect on the rest of the borough. Members were assured that the contracts would be carefully considered to mitigate the impact on any one area.

Following careful consideration and detailed debate, the Scrutiny Committee unanimously supported the Officers proposal.

The meeting closed at 7.45 p.m.

Approved as a correct record and subject to any amendments or corrections agreed and recorded in the minutes of the meeting held on 17th February 2015 they were signed by the Chair.

CHAIR