



NON-DOMESTIC RATEPAYERS CONSULTATION MEETING

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, YSTRAD MYNACH ON
TUESDAY 3RD FEBRUARY 2015 AT 5.30PM**

PRESENT:

Councillor H. David - Chair

Together with:

S. Harris (Interim Head of Corporate Finance), H. Morgan (Senior Committee Services Officer), E. Sullivan (Committee Service Officer)

Melvin Byles, Chairman of the South East Wales Federation for Small Businesses

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor K.V. Reynolds.

It was noted that Councillor S. Morgan was not present as, being a non-domestic ratepayer, he had declared an interest.

2. LOCAL GOVERNMENT FINANCE ACT 1992 - SECTION 65 - CONSULTATION WITH NON DOMESTIC RATEPAYERS

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 budget proposals.

A notice outlining the provisions of the Act and inviting non-domestic ratepayers to participate in the consultation process had been placed in the local press. Notification had also been sent to the local Chambers of Trade and the South East Wales Branch - Federation of Small Businesses.

Only one individual, Melvin Byles, of the South East Wales Federation for Small Businesses had contacted the Council as a result of the notification.

The Chair thanked Mr Byles for his interest and welcomed him to the meeting. He then invited Mr S. Harris (Interim Head of Corporate Finance), to outline the key financial pressures facing the Council in 2015/16. Mr Harris circulated copies of a summary of the draft 2015/16 budget proposals setting out the following details:-

- Whole authority cost pressures (pay awards/non-pay inflation/supported borrowing/transfers in/out and other passported grants)

- Inescapable service pressure and other service commitments (council tax reduction scheme/waste management contingency/contact centre, Bargoed/meeting the schools pledge/social services demographics/proposal for waste transfer station)
- Income (reduction in revenue support grant/reduction in outcome agreement grant/proposed council tax increase - 3.9%)
- Proposed savings (whole authority/education and lifelong learning/social services/environment/corporate services - totalling £11.960m)
- Other (reduction in fire service levy)

Reference was then made to the report that is to be presented to Cabinet on 4th February 2015 in relation to the budget proposals 2015/16 and medium term financial strategy 2015/18 (a copy of which was given to Mr Byles) and to the detailed consultation exercise that had been undertaken over the past six months. It was noted that details of feedback are appended to the report. Mr Harris advised that the proposals contained within this report would deliver a balanced budget for 2015/16 on the basis that council tax is increased by 3.9%.

Mr Byles was invited to comment on the information received and he advised that he would be more than happy to be part of any future consultation and would share the content of the report with his colleagues and correspond with Mr Harris as required, prior to being presented to Cabinet/Council on 25th February 2015.

It was accepted that whilst proposed savings have been identified for 2015/16, those for 2016/17 and 2017/18 will be more challenging. Mr Harris advised that during the coming months detailed work will be carried out to identify a range of savings proposals to meet the significant financial challenges that lie ahead and that they would be the subject of a further extensive consultation process. The views of all stakeholders, which will feed into the process, would be welcomed and encouraged.

The Chair suggested that Mr Byles attend a future meeting of the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee to give evidence and brief Members on the role of the Federation. Arrangements would be made in due course.

With regard to non-domestic rates, which are set as a means by which businesses and other users of non-domestic property contribute towards the costs of local authority services, it was noted that NDR is calculated by taking the rateable value of a property and multiplying it by the NDR 'multiplier' for the year in question. The multiplier is set by Welsh Government and the payment collected by local authorities on its behalf. Welsh Government capped the increase to 2% for 2014/15 and has confirmed that a 2% cap will also apply for 2015/16. It was noted that there are plans to undertake a revised valuation (to take effect in April 2017) but that to date no arrangements have been made.

During the course of the debate, Mr Byles advised the meeting that in November last year a letter was sent to all local authorities on behalf of the Federation with queries relating to NDR Relief Schemes. In that the most comprehensive reply received was from this authority, Mr Byles wished to place on record his appreciation for the informative and helpful response that he had received from John Carpenter (Council Tax & NNDR Manager).

The Chair thanked those present for their attendance and contribution and closed the meeting at 6pm.