

THE VALE OF GLAMORGAN COUNCIL

CORPORATE PERFORMANCE AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE:
22ND DECEMBER, 2021

REFERENCE FROM HOMES AND SAFE COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE: 16TH DECEMBER, 2021

“ INITIAL REVENUE BUDGET PROPOSALS 2022/23 (DEH) –

The Interim Head of Finance/S151 Officer explained that the Council's provisional settlement had not yet been announced by Welsh Government and was expected this year on 21st December, 2021 with the final settlement due to be published in March, 2022. Even though this crucial information had not been received yet, the budget setting and consultation process had to commence in order to meet statutory deadlines. Therefore, several scenarios had to be considered in terms of potential funding by Welsh Government (WG):

- A cash neutral settlement.
- A 1% reduction each year.
- A 1% increase each year.
- The settlement for 2022/23 being at the same level as the 2021/22 settlement (4.42%).

The cost pressures for this Committee totalled £2.2m, including the provision of B&B accommodation; although there was the potential for WG to fund some of the block booking of rooms from next year. This was confirmed by the Head of Housing and Building Services, who explained that the Council had been in talks with WG officials today concerning funding and the block booking of B&B and temporary accommodation for homeless persons for next year and WG had offered their assurance such funding would be available if required. However, discussions and negotiations on this issue were still ongoing with WG and the Council needed to consider what the exact needs and demands would be for such accommodation next year within the Vale, particularly in light of the growing number of new housing developments coming on stream next year which could help to house people in temporary accommodation or who have become homeless. The Council needed to avoid over booking B&B and other temporary accommodation, as this could result in unused rooms.

The Interim Head of Finance/S151 Officer then referred to the various options / scenarios for the level of Council Tax to be fixed by the Council for 2022 / 23, which were as follows:

- The latest reported CPI rate which was 3.2% (although this had come from the CPI level in August and had since risen);
- A 3.9% increase which was the same level as Council Tax increased in 2021/22;

- Or an increase to the Welsh average, which would be 7.05% in 2022/23. As a result the potential shortfalls from the varying levels of Council Tax proposed ranged from £13.6m to £26m.

Following the Officer's presentation, the subsequent questions and comments were raised by the Committee:

- Councillor Brooks referred to the potential, continued, funding by WG of the temporary accommodation, which could help the Council's cost pressures substantially. She also asked about the review of Cadoxton House referred to within the report under cost pressures. The Head of Housing and Building Services explained that the review was around a change of use in the building, with certain Council and Third Sector services relocating from the building and providing services differently, which would impact the running costs on the building and, if the building was declared surplus by the Council, the associated costs pressures due to the 'clawback' clause by WG as part of its previous funding. Other options included leasing the building to other organisations either on a short or medium- or long-term basis or to convert it into housing. It was also important to stress however that the changes and the review around Cadoxton House did not entail any reduction in services such as around drug and alcohol addiction, due to such support being co-ordinated from alternative accommodation. It was agreed to endorse and refer this review to Corporate Performance and Resources Scrutiny Committee as an example of a means that the Council could look at addressing its cost pressures by looking 'outside' the box by way of looking at alternative uses for the building, etc.
- Councillor Bird asked if the proposed funding from WG for temporary accommodation would fully negate its £2m cost pressure; the Head of Housing and Building Services explained that it would not, as this was the full year cost based on approximately 120 rooms occupied in three hotels. If the Council estimated that the numbers of rooms needed next year were less than this, then it would still be a proportion of that £2m that would remain. However, the exact amount of rooms required would still continue to be impacted by the pandemic and the numbers of homeless, so the proportion of costs pressures to be negated could still be relatively small.
- Councillor Hanks asked about the way forward on the ongoing issue with costs pressures and CCTV provision within the Vale and the increasing obsolescence and break downs of the existing CCTV stock, as well as the long wait for South Wales Police to assist in its provision. The Head of Housing and Building Services replied that there were 77 CCTV cameras within the Vale and due to the age of the existing CCTV stock that some of the cameras no longer function. However, the Council had committed £350k to renewing the CCTV stock and had no plans to reduce their numbers. Currently the Council funds all the revenue costs for CCTV, but with other agencies also using this service. The Council were looking for these partners to assist with the CCTV costs, with officials from the Police and Crime Commissioner for South Wales Police (PCC) indicating they would help with revenue funding for CCTV (subject to final approval from the PCC Executive Board). The Council were currently working with Cardiff Council to develop a regional approach to CCTV monitoring in conjunction with the Police Basic

Command Unit (BCU) for Cardiff and the Vale. In the meantime, the current CCTV system continued to be monitored by Bridgend Council and maintained by the CCTV contractor.

- Councillor Perkes enquired about the DAARC (Domestic Abuse Assessment and Referral Co-ordinator) service not being included on the costs pressures within the report, to which the Head of Housing and Building Services replied that the cost pressures for the service had been alleviated by a combination of funding through the Council's base budget, Housing Support Grant and the Council successfully attracting further WG grants for DAARC, moving as it had from a pilot to a 'mainstream' project. Such funding had meant an expansion of the service's existing functions, as well as recruitment of an advocate for children who had witnessed domestic violence at home and had led to the recommissioning of the Domestic Abuse Service through Atal Y Fro, who had entered into a long-term contract to provide this service.
- Councillor Nugent-Finn asked where the new Drug and Alcohol Outreach Service was based, with the Head of Housing and Building Services stating that he would speak to the relevant lead officer in order to provide a list of current outreach services and locations.

Committee, having considered the report and all the issues and implications contained therein, subsequently

RECOMMENDED –

- (1) T H A T the Initial Revenue Budget Proposals for 2022/23 be noted.
- (2) T H A T Corporate Performance and Resources Scrutiny Committee be advised of the ongoing importance of funding the cost pressures as set out in Appendix 1 to the report including the provision of B&B accommodation (pending clarification of the exact cost pressures for B&B accommodation as a result of further discussions on continued grant funding from Welsh Government).
- (3) T H A T the Corporate Performance and Resources Scrutiny Committee considers the endorsement by the Homes and Safe Communities Scrutiny Committee of the Council's review of Cadoxton House and the potential alternative uses for the building as part of looking at costs pressures.

Reasons for recommendations

- (1) Having regard to the contents of the report and discussions at the meeting.
- (2) In order to maintain funding for the services provided in Appendix 1.
- (3) To endorse the Council's review of alternative ways and uses of the building and their impact on costs pressures."