

No.

ENVIRONMENT AND REGENERATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of an Extraordinary Hybrid Meeting held on 13th February, 2024.

The Committee agenda is available [here](#).

The recording of the meeting is available [here](#).

Present: Councillor S. Lloyd-Selby (Chair); Councillor I.A.N. Perry (Vice-Chair); Councillors C.E.A. Champion, P. Drake, V.P. Driscoll, M.J. Hooper, C. Iannucci, E. Penn and J. Protheroe.

Also present: Councillors A. Asbrey, B.E. Brooks (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Sustainable Places), L. Burnett (Executive Leader and Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources), C.P. Franks, E. Goodjohn, W.A. Hennessy, Dr. I.J. Johnson and E. Williams (Cabinet Member for Social Care and Health).

808 ANNOUNCEMENT –

Prior to the commencement of the business of the Committee, the Chair read the following statement: “May I remind everyone present that the meeting will be live streamed as well as recorded via the internet and this recording archived for future viewing”.

809 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE –

These were received from Councillors A.M. Ernest and S.T. Wiliam.

810 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST –

Councillor S. Lloyd-Selby declared an interest in respect of Agenda Item No. 3 – Initial Budget 2024/25 and Medium Term Financial Plan 2024/25 to 2028/29 Proposals for Consultation. The nature of the interest related to the telecare service and Social Care charges for which Councillor Lloyd-Selby had received dispensation from the Standards Committee to speak, but not vote on such matters. Therefore, Councillor Lloyd-Selby remained in the meeting for the duration of the item.

811 INITIAL BUDGET 2024/25 AND MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN 2024/25 TO 2028/29 PROPOSALS FOR CONSULTATION (REF) –

The reference from Cabinet of 18th January, 2024 as contained within the agenda was presented.

Councillor M. Hooper raised a series of points and queries:

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- It was important to reference that the UK Government had passed on savings onto Welsh Government and therefore savings had been passed on to Local Authorities;
- Prices had been increased by a rate of inflation of 6.7%, but the current inflation as of today was around 4%;
- The Council needed to consider using zero based budgeting;
- The report referenced opportunities for transformation and there were further opportunities around the impact on net zero commitments;
- There was a concern with regard to a reduction in the use agency staff;
- The report indicated a total budget saving of £7.8m but was that the actual savings amount, particularly as there were future pay award pressures.

In response to the points raised by Councillor Hooper, the Head of Finance / Section 151 Officer stated that in terms of the Consumer Price Index and inflation, although the rate had reduced recently, the level of inflation had increased for most of the previous year after the September budget and so the costs were already impacting Council services. With regard to zero based budgeting, that was something that could be considered particularly as a piece of work for the Budget Working Groups, had been done to a certain degree this year and last. However, there was an issue in relation to capacity and there was a need to review all Council costs as part of the budget setting process. In relation to transformation and Project Zero, the officer advised that further information would be sought outside of the meeting. In reply to the query on agency staff, it was important to recognise that budget proposals had been closely aligned to protecting the most vulnerable people and that was a big challenge. Time would tell on how effective the Council proposals had been. With regard to further budget savings, the Council had undertaken a significant piece of work to manage £38m of cost pressures which had been decreased to £21m. The Council would be monitoring those pressures that had not been awarded which would include the future pay award. There may be some relief if the inflation rate was to continue to fall below 4%. One aspect that service would have to manage was around vacancy control and the issue of homelessness was highlighted as a full cost pressure in the budget. Funding for homelessness was supported by reserves on a temporary basis but there were opportunities to reduce costs as part of the Council's Housing Strategy in relation to social and private rental housing.

In being asked to comment on the use of agency staff, the Director of Place stated that in terms of his service area, agency staff had been used in order to fill a post which had been vacant for some time and so it had been filled on a short term basis. The Council tended to use agency staff in instances where posts were less than full time or where there was a special skill that was difficult to recruit.

Councillor J. Protheroe referred to the proposal to introduce charges for toilets in coastal areas and she stated that from the perspective of a female resident and in terms of health and dignity for elderly people and people with a medical condition, it would be appropriate for that proposal to be reviewed.

The Chair, Councillor S. Lloyd-Selby, added that it would be useful to clarify whether the charges for toilets included those used by disabled people or would they be exempt. In reply, the Head of Neighbourhood Services and Transport stated that in

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relation to toilets there were two proposals, one was to look at the rationalisation of toilets and to review the provisions and the other was around the introduction of charges within coastal areas. The officer stated that there was an option if the Committee felt strongly for a recommendation to be made for the £5k savings for the charging of coastal toilets to be considered as part of the general toilet review.

Councillor Hooper asked to raise some further points, and he referred to parking charges and how that would help protect the most vulnerable. In addition, Councillor Hooper agreed with the points made by Councillor Protheroe in that charges for toilets impacted more on women and families with children on a disproportionate basis. Councillor Hooper queried the proposal in relation to offering an MOT service at the Alps Depot and he asked for some further information in terms of costs and the number of cars that would use such a service. In reply, the Head of Neighbourhood Services and Transport stated that the proposal in relation to MOTs was about ensuring that the Council service was used to its full capacity which would bring in an income.

In reply to a query regarding the £10k savings in relation to the enforcement car, the Head of Neighbourhood Services and Transport advised that the £10k was additional income.

The Chair commented that a number of proposals contained within the report, such as residential parking permits, were items on the Committee's Forward Work Programme for future consideration.

Councillor E. Penn queried whether the 0.5% from Council Tax to be used to support non-commercial bus services was match funded by Welsh Government. In reply, the Head of Neighbourhood Services and Transport advised that the £470k referred to in the budget report was a very small portion of the required budget. The likely full budget would be in the region of £2.7m, but the total amount included a significant rise from Welsh Government which would be used to support such bus services as the X2 that ran from Bridgend through to Cardiff. The Chair also highlighted that the future of supported bus services was an item listed for the Committee's April meeting.

Councillor I. Perry raised concern regarding the potential impact on rural residents as a result of changes to the gritting regime. In addition, Councillor Perry highlighted the issue of littering across all parts of the Vale and he stated that charges for toilets would be unpopular and unfair.

There being no further comments or queries, the Committee

RECOMMENDED –

- (1) T H A T the updated financial position as set out in the report be noted.
- (2) T H A T the Corporate Performance and Resources Scrutiny Committee be advised of the concern of the Environment and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee in relation to the proposed £5k savings for the review of charges for coastal toilets, and for that savings to be reviewed and for an Equalities Impact Assessment to be

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undertaken in terms of any potential impacts in relation to gender and people with a disability.

Reasons for recommendations

- (1) Having regard to the contents of the report and discussions at the meeting.
- (2) To advise the Corporate Performance and Resources Scrutiny Committee of the concerns in relation to the savings proposed for the charges for the use of coastal toilets.

812 DRAFT CAPITAL PROGRAMME PROPOSALS 2024/25 TO 2028/29 (REF) –

The reference from Cabinet of 18th January, 2024 as contained within the agenda was presented.

Councillor E. Penn referred to the Windsor Road retaining wall scheme and he queried whether the £200k was sufficient. In reply, the Director of Environment and Housing advised that the £200k related to the design phase and the full cost as yet was unknown. The total cost of the project would be determined following the recommendations and proposals identified by the contractor.

In reply to a query regarding the road improvements to the Llandow Waste Recycling Centre, the Director stated that the Council was working in partnership with the landowner and road improvement works had commenced. Further road improvements would be carried out over the next few months and there was also the possibility of improving accessibility to the skips and the waste containers.

Subsequently, it was

RECOMMENDED – T H A T both the Cabinet reference and appended Cabinet report be noted.

Reason for recommendation

Having regard to the contents of both the Cabinet reference and appended report and the draft Capital Programme proposals for 2024/25 to 2028/29.