

COUNCIL

(Civic Centre, Port Talbot)

Members Present:

7 March 2024

The Mayor: Councillor Chris Williams

The Deputy Mayor: Councillor Matthew Crowley

Councillors: A.R.Aubrey, T.Bowen, W.Carpenter, H.C.Clarke, C.Clement-Williams, M.Crowley, A.Dacey, H.Davies, H.Davies, O.S.Davies, R.Davies, S.E.Freeguard, C.Galsworthy, N.Goldup-John, W.F.Griffiths, J.Hale, S.Harris, M.Harvey, J.Henton, S.K.Hunt, J.Hurley, C.James, N.Jenkins, J.Jones, L.Jones, R.G.Jones, S.Jones, C.Jordan, S.A.Knoyle, E.V.Latham, C.Lewis, D.Lewis, A.Llewelyn, A.R.Lockyer, A.Lodwig, R.Mizen, K.Morris, S.Paddison, D.M.Peters, C.Phillips, R.Phillips, S.Pursey, S.Rahaman, P.A.Rees, S.Renkes, S.H.Reynolds, G.Rice, A.J.Richards, P.D.Richards, P.Rogers, S.Thomas, D.Whitelock, C.Williams, L.Williams, R.W.Wood and B.Woolford

Officers in Attendance: S.Curran, N.Daniel, C.Furlow-Harris, C.Griffiths, A.Hinder, C.Howard, A.Jarrett, K.Jones, R.Livingstone, A.O'Donnell, C.Owen, N.Pearce, C.Plowman, M.Shaw, J.Stevens, A.Thomas, A.Thomas, A.Thomas and K.Warren

Representatives of the Translation Service: Present

1. **Declarations of Interest**

Cllr Mike Harvey In relation to Agenda Item 3 and 6 as he is employed by South Wales Police.

2. Revenue Budget Proposals 2024/25

Cllr Simon Knoyle, Cabinet Member for Finance, Performance and Social Justice introduced the report which had been commended to Council from Cabinet on 6th March 2024.

The Chief Finance Officer, the Finance Team, the Chief Executive and the Corporate Directors were thanked for all the work that has been undertaken in developing the budget being considered at Council.

The proposed 7.9% increase to Council Tax was explained and the detail broken down against the percentage uplift received from the Welsh Government.

It was stated that the Barnett formula is inadequate and does not allow Local Government to deliver its services, meaning that the Council has to make very difficult choices.

It was explained that this balanced budget sets out to protect jobs and services and the assumptions on pay awards, inflation and energy were explained.

One off contributions were explained, including £720,000 to schools to assist with their end of year energy costs and £780,000 to the Environment Directorate to fund in year energy costs. It was stated that £700,000 will be added to the reserve balance to fund lighting replacement programmes.

The Social Services and Community Safety budget will increase by 7.7% but it was reiterated that the services is still using £6 million of reserves to fund a number of invest to save proposals in order to provide a new direction for the service.

It was explained that it is estimated that the cost of providing Council services will increase by £128 million by 2028/29 which leaves a budget gap of £48 million after assumed Welsh Government funding, with the likelihood that the gap could increase further. The Medium Term Financial Plan is reviewed and updated regularly.

The level of specific reserves was explained, and Council was informed that the level of these are now well above pre pandemic levels. The forecast budget for specific reserves is £58 million which is being used to meet specific spend to save projects. This provided

the Council with good resilience and potential useage over the upcoming years.

The level of general reserves was explained, as per the levels agreed in the Medium Term Financial Plan set and agreed in January 2022 and currently set to reduce to £15 million which is approximately 4% of the Council's net revenue budget (a level recommended by the Chief Finance Officer.) Last year, the level of general reserves was £20 million and approximately 5.7% of the Council's net revenue budget. The correlation between the cost increases and the reserves decreases at the same cash level was explained. Members heard how the Chief Finance Officer intends to survey other Welsh Councils on their reserves position to ascertain the reasonableness of this Council's reserve position.

It was suggested that due to the ongoing severity of the Cost of Living crisis, the proposed Council Tax increase should be reduced and the use of reserves should be maximised.

Questions were raised on the robustness of the income generation targets included in the proposals.

There was concern about the position of the schools budgets, with and their deficit position, ongoing pay awards and energy costs.

There followed a request for a recorded vote on the recommendation contained in the circulated report, which received the requisite support in accordance with the requirements of Section 14.5 of Part 4 of the Council's Constitution- Rules of Procedure.

For the recommendation:

Councillors: A, Aubrey, T. Bowen, W. Carpenter, H. Clarke, A. Dacey, Hayley Davies, Heath Davies, R. Davies, N. Goldup John, W. Griffiths, J. Hale, S. Harris, J. Henton, S. Hunt, J. Hurley, N. Jenkins, J. Jones, S. Jones, C. Jordan, S. Knoyle, C. Lewis, D. Lewis, A. Llewellyn, A. Ludwig, K. Morris, M. Peters, C. Phillips, R. Phillips, A. Richards, P. Rogers, B. Woolford.

Against the recommendation:

Councillors: C. Clement Williams, O Davies, S. Freeguard, C. Galsworthy, M. Harvey, C. James, L. Jones, R. Jones, E. V. Latham, A. Lockyer, R. Mizen, S. Paddison, S. Pursey, S. Rahaman, P. Rees,

S.Renkes, S.Reynolds, G.Rice, P. Richards, S.Thomas, D.Whitelock,
L Williams, R.Wood.

Abstention:

Councillors: C Williams, M Crowley.

RESOLVED:

Having given due regard to the Integrated Impact Assessment:

1. That the revenue budget proposals and arrangements as per appendix 1 of the report for 2024/2025 be APPROVED.

2. a) The following matters be delegated to the appropriate Corporate Director following consultation with the Council Leader, relevant Cabinet Member and Chair of the relevant Scrutiny Committee:-

-Fees and Charges (Executive Functions) applicable for the financial year 2024/2025

-Fees and Charges (Executive Functions) which are applicable in any subsequent financial year and which, in the opinion of the relevant Corporate Director, need to be set in advance of the financial year for operational reasons.

b) The following matters be delegated to the appropriate Corporate Director following consultation with the Council Leader, Deputy Leader and relevant non-executive committee

- Fees and Charges (Non Executive Functions) applicable in 2024/25

- Fees and charges applicable in any subsequent financial year and which, in the opinion of the Corporate Director, need to be set in advance of that financial year for operational reasons

3. That authority be delegated to the Chief Finance Officer, in consultation with the Chief Executive, Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance Performance and Social Justice to make any amendment necessary through the use of general reserves as a consequence of any variation between the Welsh Government Final Settlement and the provisional settlement.
4. That the Council Tax 2024/2025 will increase by 7.9% and the Band D equivalent for Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council will be £1,871.76

3. **Capital Strategy and Capital Programme 2024/25 TO 2026/27**

Cllr Simon Knoyle, Cabinet Member for Finance, Performance and Social Justice introduced the report setting out the Capital Strategy and Capital Programme for 2024/25 to 2026/27.

RESOLVED:

That the Capital Strategy be APPROVED.

That the Capital Programme for 2024/25 to 2025/26 as detailed in Appendix 2 be APPROVED.

That the delegation arrangements set out in the report be APPROVED.

4. **Treasury Management Strategy, Annual Investment Strategy, and Minimum Revenue Provision Policy**

Cllr Simon Knoyle, Cabinet Member for Finance, Performance and Social Justice introduced the report setting out the Council's Treasury Management Strategy, Annual Investment Strategy and Minimum Revenue Provision Policy for 2024/25.

RESOLVED:

- That the Treasury Management Strategy be APPROVED.
- That the Annual Investment Strategy be APPROVED.
- That the Minimum Revenue Provision Policy be APPROVED.

- That the Prudential Indicators Policy be APPROVED.

5. **Council Tax 2024/25**

Cllr Simon Knoyle, Cabinet Member for Finance, Performance and Social Justice introduced the report setting out the calculations and necessary resolutions to be passed in relation to the setting of the level of Council Tax for 24/25 in accordance with the Local Government Finance Act 1992.

RESOLVED:

a) That any expenses incurred by Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council in performing in part of its area, a function performed by a Community Council, elsewhere in its area, are treated as the Authority's general expenses be APPROVED.

b) That the levy of the Swansea Bay Port Health Authority is treated as a general expense be APPROVED.

c) That the amounts detailed in the circulated report and associated appendices as calculated in accordance with Sections 32 to 36 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 be APPROVED.

6. **Notice of Motion under Section 10 of Part 4 (Rules of Procedure) the Council's Constitution**

One Notice of Motion under Section 10 of Part 4 (Rules of Procedure) of the Council's Constitution was received.

The then Cabinet took the decision in 2022, following intense debate and discussion over a period of a few months, to insource indoor leisure services from Celtic Leisure Limited by 1st April 2023. However, the decision has now been made, without reference to scrutiny, to defer the insourcing of Celtic Leisure to 1st April 2025 at the earliest. Leisure services whilst non-statutory, provide resources for residents that play a key role in promoting health and wellbeing and therefore full attention must now be given to address this as part of service delivery and of course noting budget constraints. They fulfil aspects, relating particularly to prevention and early intervention, of our duty as a Council under the Social Services and Wellbeing Wales (2014) act; also support requirements for physical education within the Education Act Wales (2002); as well as considerations of

sustainability of facilities and services under the Wellbeing of Future Generations act (2015). It is therefore, incumbent on us to ensure that these services are offered in a manner that integrates into, and meets needs identified through our statutory services, particularly Social Services and Education. The current obesity epidemic and the known benefits of exercise and access to countryside for those suffering from mental health issues is also relevant to our considerations. Unions representing Leisure staff have called for a joint working group with Council to consider bringing services in house and it is noted ongoing dialogue is taking place with trade unions. If all Councillors are to have a clear view in relation to the decision relating to the insourcing of Leisure Services, it is essential that the work is undertaken to consider potential models and put together a clear and well evidenced business case to inform the decision that needs to be taken without further delay.

It is therefore proposed that the Council establish a cross-party Task and Finish group (terms and conditions to be agreed by the cross-party group), with trade unions and other appropriate organisations as relevant stakeholders, to explore, develop and present to Cabinet an appropriate business case to underpin decisions relating to the future control and operation of the Council's Leisure Services post April 2025.

Proposed by Cllr Cathy James and seconded by Cllr Sonia Reynolds.

Cllr Cen Phillips, Cabinet Member for Nature Tourism and Wellbeing responded to Council. It was detailed that a Working Group is established with the Trade Unions and other key stakeholders Working Group which have met twice with the plan to bring the outline report to Cabinet and scrutiny in late summer/early autumn 2024 on the options that are available. It was felt this motion may delay the good work and progress of this groups and therefore delay this planned report back on the future of indoor leisure services. Council were reminded that the Education, Skills and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee has leisure services in its remit, and should the committee request it, they could be involved in the development of this work.

There followed a request for a recorded vote on the recommendation contained in the circulated report, which received the requisite support in accordance with the requirements of Section 14.5 of Part 4 of the Council's Constitution- Rules of Procedure.

For the motion:

Councillors: C.Clement Williams, O Davies, S. Freeguard, C.Galsworthy, M.Harvey, C.James L.Jones. R.Jones, EV.Latham, A.Lockyer, R.Mizen, S.Paddison, S.Purse, S.Rahaman, P.Rees, S.Rekes, S.Reynolds, G.Rice, P.Richards, S.Thomas, D.Whitehead, L.Williams, R.Wood.

Against the motion:

Councillors: A, Aubrey, T. Bowen, W. Carpenter, H.Clarke, Hayley Davies, Heath Davies, R.Davies, N,Goldup John, W.Griffiths, J.Hale, S.Harris, J. Henton, S.Hunt. J.Hurley. N.Jenkins. J.Jones S.Jones. C.Jordan S.Knoyle. C.Lewis, D.Lewis, A.Llewellyn, A, Ludwig, M. Peters,C.Phillips, R.Phillips, A Richards, P.Rogers, B.Woolford.

Abstentions:

Cllr C James and Cllr M Crowley.

The notice of motion was therefore NOT SUPPORTED.

7. **Questions from Members, with Notice, under Rule 9.2 of the Council's Procedure Rules**

There were none.

8. **Urgent Items**

There were none.

CHAIRPERSON