

CABINET SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

(Council Chamber - Port Talbot Civic Centre)

Members Present:

31 January, 2017

Chairman: Councillor A.Jenkins

Councillors: A.Carter, Ms.C.Clement-Williams, M.Harvey, Mrs.D.Jones, A.Llewelyn, A.R.Lockyer, Mrs.K.Pearson, L.M.Purcell, S.Rahaman, I.D.Williams and Mrs.A.Wingrave

Officers In Attendance S.Phillips, H.Jenkins, A.Evans, N. Jarman, G.Nutt, D.Rees, Mrs.A.Manchipp and Ms.N.Headon

Cabinet Invitees: Councillors A.H.Thomas, M.L.James, E.V.Latham, Mrs.S.Miller, P.A.Rees, P.D.Richards, J.Rogers and A.N.Woolcock

Invitee: Councillor Mrs S.M.Penry

1. MEMBER'S DECLARATION OF INTEREST

Councillor M.Harvey	The report of the Corporate Directors' Group on Budget Monitoring 2016/17, the Budget for 2017/18 and the report of the Head of Financial Services on the Capital Programme 2017/18 to 2019/20 as it related to CCTV as he is employed by the South Wales Police.
---------------------	---

2. REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING 2016/17

Committee received an overview of the Report of the Corporate Directors' Group in relation to the Revenue Budget Monitoring for 2016/17. Members then raised the following:

- What were the reasons behind the overspends in both Margam Park and parking and were advised that in relation to Margam Park – the anticipated income from filming, in the region of £55k had not been realised, however a contract had been secured for the next financial year. Negotiations were ongoing in relation to the future of Twyn Yr Hydd while the Orangerie was doing well but needed to be monitored closely. In relation to parking, Members were advised that charges had been reduced earlier in the financial year and whilst there were still fixed costs, income had been reduced.
- Costs in relation to the increasing external provision of Domiciliary Care were raised and the Director of Social Services, Health and Housing advised that there had historically a double handling of cases and an overprovision of service. This had now been addressed;
- Members asked whether the underspend on staff within childrens' services was putting a strain on the current workforce. The Director of Social Services, Health and Housing advised that this was not the case as there was a strict limit of 15 cases per social worker together with a fall in the number of children being taken into care, as a result of successful early intervention. He confirmed that there were a few vacancies within the service, however there were no plans to reduce the level of staffing;

Following scrutiny, the Committee was supportive of the proposals to be considered by Cabinet.

3. **CAPITAL BUDGET MONITORING 2016/17**

The Committee was supportive of the proposals to be considered by Cabinet.

4. **BUDGET 2017/18**

After presentation of the report, Members raised the following points:

- Should the Draft Budget for 2017/18 be approved would this result in compulsory redundancies. The Chief Executive advised that compulsory redundancies would be avoided for 2017/18, however as the Workforce Agreement was no longer in place there could be no guarantees going forward. The Early Retirement/Voluntary Redundancy scheme was continuing to

work however the number of staff taking part was reducing year on year;

- In relation to the proposed cut in the schools' base budget, Members expressed concern that some schools were already struggling financially and that this may result in compulsory redundancies. The Chief Executive advised that the cut in schools' base budgets had been reduced and that as part of the consultation process, discussions had been held with primary and secondary schools regarding, for example, the level of sickness. A pilot scheme had been run in schools to reduce the levels of sickness and this had appeared to have a positive impact. In addition Members were advised that reserves in schools needed to be carefully managed. Members were also reminded that the teaching Trade Unions had refused year on year to sign up to the Council's Workforce Agreement. This had resulted in the other Trade Unions refusing to continue with the Agreement beyond 2016/17.
- Members also referred to the Authority's facilities at Margam Park, Pontardawe Arts Centre and Cefn Coed Museum. Concern was expressed at the cuts in funding to both Pontardawe Arts Centre (in the region of £30k) and Cefn Coed Museum (in the region of £10k). In relation to the Pontardawe Arts Centre, Members were advised that officers were looking in to possible investment streams and also at the opening/staffing hours compared with the Princess Royal Theatre in Port Talbot. The Director of Education Leisure and Lifelong Learning confirmed that he was confident in the future of the Arts Centre. In relation to the Cefn Coed Museum, this would reopen for a 4 day week commencing in Easter, rising to 5 days per week in May. In order to assist £10k had been put into specific reserves.
- In relation to Crime and Disorder, Members asked the reason behind the decision taken by the City and County of Swansea not to collaborate on CCTV. The Director of Finance and Corporate Services advised Members that Welsh Government had issued new guidelines on the siting of cameras, which had resulted in the Authority removing those units not in compliance.

(At this point in the meeting Cllr.M.Harvey re affirmed his interest in this item and withdrew from the meeting during discussion thereon).

Members expressed concern that Welsh Government was supporting collaboration as a way of reducing costs while the savings to be realised were minor. The Welsh Government had today published its White Paper. Details of the collaboration accountability arrangements would need to be clarified by Welsh Government. The Chief Executive would report further to Members in due course.

Members felt that a reinvestment into visible services such as fly tipping, etc was necessary and asked why the one off payment of £1.2m in 2016/17 had been reduced to £970k in 2017/18.

Members questioned why the Authority was not using more of its reserves to underpin the budget, when the amount in reserves had increased by £2m. Members asked what was the acceptable range of reserves and were advised that it would be prudent to retain around 5% of the budget, however as the austerity continued it was advisable to retain the reserves in order to prop up the budget and maintain service delivery going forward. Members were also reminded that the reserves were utilised to respond to emergencies in the County Borough, such as flooding.

In relation to sickness in schools, Members commented that a review of sickness in schools would show that non-teaching staff had the highest rate of sickness. At this point Members asked if £1m of the reserves could be used to offset the cuts to the school base budget and Cefn Coed Museum.

Following scrutiny, the majority of the Committee was supportive of the proposals to be considered by Cabinet.

5. **CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2017/18 TO 2019/20**

Members received the report of the Head of Financial Services in relation to the above and raised the following:-

- In relation to the funding, Members sought confirmation of the amount of Welsh Government unhyphocated grant/borrowing. It was confirmed that this totalled £7.131m and together with other specific grants and funding resulted in a capital programme of £59m;

- In relation to the Strategic School Improvement Programme (SSIP) Members asked whether a timescale had been agreed in relation to Band B schools and noted that Band A was scheduled for completion by 2019 and that Band B was scheduled to start thereafter;
- In relation to the Vibrant and Viable Places Scheme, Members asked whether there had been any feedback on the Authority's request to extend the funding. Members were advised that projects were being identified should additional funding become available. In addition Members requested an update as to how funding would be affected following Brexit. It was confirmed that bids were being submitted to WEFO to maximise existing funding and that the UK Government had guaranteed funding would continue after 2019 for those projects already approved at the time of instigating the Article 50 Notice.

Following scrutiny, the Committee was supportive of the proposals to be considered by Cabinet.

6. **TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY, ANNUAL INVESTMENT STRATEGY AND MINIMUM REVENUE PROVISION POLICY**

The Committee was supportive of the proposals to be considered by Cabinet.

CHAIRMAN