

POLICY AND RESOURCES/ CABINET SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

(Council Chamber - Port Talbot Civic Centre)

Members Present:

8 November, 2017

Chairperson: Councillor A.N.Woolcock

Vice Chairperson: Councillor S.Rahaman

Councillors: M.Crowley, S.E.Freeguard, M.Harvey,
S.K.Hunt, H.N.James, S.Miller, J.D.Morgan,
S.Paddison, S.M.Penry, L.M.Purcell,
A.L.Thomas and J.Warman

Officers In Attendance S.Phillips, H.Jenkins, G.Nutt and A.Evans

Cabinet Invitees: Councillors R.G.Jones, A.J.Taylor, C.Clement-Williams, D.Jones, E.V.Latham, A.R.Lockyer, P.A.Rees, P.D.Richards and A.Wingrave

1. MEMBER'S DECLARATION OF INTEREST

The following Member made a declaration of interest at the commencement of the meeting:-

Councillor M.Harvey

Re the reports of the Corporate Directors' Group on the Draft Budget and Revenue Budget Monitoring as they relate to CCTV as he is employed by the South Wales Police.

2. DRAFT BUDGET 2018/19

The Committee received a presentation in relation to the Draft Budget for 2018/19. Members noted that the proposals would, following agreement by Cabinet, be put out for consultation until 15 January, 2018. The report would also be considered at Special meetings of

the Authority's Scrutiny Committees as part of the consultation process. The responses received would then be considered by Cabinet and Council.

Members then raised the following points:-

- The cost of an additional half hour service at the Margam Crematorium was quite low compared to crematoria in neighbouring Authorities. Members were advised that the fees and charges in relation to the Crematorium at Margam were determined by the Margam Joint Crematorium Committee and a review of the charges would be carried out in the usual manner.
- In relation to the proposed increase in Council Tax of 4.5%, concern was expressed at the amount of the increase and asked whether this could be reduced? The Director of Finance and Corporate Services advised that every 1% decrease in Council Tax was equivalent to needing another £500k savings or income generation. English Local Authorities had been investigating income generation opportunities for some time as their Council Tax rises had been capped at 2%. Members were therefore pleased that the Deputy Leader was now chairing an Income Generation Working Group in order to identify relevant opportunities.
- Members questioned whether the consultation process was accessible enough for residents and stakeholders as there appeared to be few responses received. Officers agreed that this was the case during the 2016/17 budget consultation as it was felt that the report was too complicated. Going forward for the 2017/18 we changed the consultation process, this had been issued to libraries, on line and in addition press releases had been issued highlighting the proposals and received more feedback. The Council will again be following that process for the 2018/19 consultation. Officers were looking at ways of making the process more inclusive for the future. The Leader of Council advised Members that he had recently made a video recording which would be issued as part of the consultation.
- Members asked whether there would be flexibility in relation to the proposed £40k cut in funding for Pontardawe Arts Centre as the Friends of Pontardawe Arts Centre had recently been formed and would require some time to get established. In addition consideration should be given to the future use of the Centre by Social Services clients as this may not be possible on the current basis. Members were advised that the Arts Council for Wales had undertaken an audit of the Centre which had

highlighted potential income generation opportunities, which were being reviewed.

- Members asked for an update on the car parking charges throughout the County Borough and were advised that the pilot scheme, reducing the charges in order to increase the numbers, had not produced an increase in footfall to local shops and hence income was down in the current year. Officers were therefore looking at proposing that the charges be increased and be consistent across all the Authority's car parks.
- Members questioned the increase in Council reserves as a result of budget management and were advised that some of these monies would be used to offset the costs of ER/VR over the next 2 years.
- Members acknowledged the potential issues over the next five years including Brexit, interest rates and legislative changes, etc. Officers advised that austerity would probably continue for some time.

Following Scrutiny, the Committee was supportive of the proposal to be considered by Cabinet.

3. **REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING**

Members questioned whether the provision for children in residential care could be brought in house and were advised that these were very complex cases and needed specialist care, as such it was difficult to predict the number of places required and the type of care which was needed.

Concern was expressed that if the Authority continued to make savings as a result of ER/VR/CR service delivery would be detrimentally affected. This position would be monitored by Officers, however it was noted that Social Services in this Authority cost 8% more than Welsh Government felt it should. Therefore saving would need to be found, whilst safeguarding services to both vulnerable children and adults.

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

4. **CAPITAL PROGRAMME MONITORING**

Committee received the above report and made the following points:-

- How were the allocation of the Road Safety Improvement Grants and the Regeneration Grants made? In relation to the Road Safety Improvement Grants, bids were drawn up in line with the criteria and once approved by Cabinet Board were submitted to Welsh Government for funding approval. In relation to the Regeneration Grants these were received from Welsh Government and required match funding from the Authority.
- Whether it would be possible to place a charge on properties with Disabled Facilities in order that the Council can recoup the money spent on the installation of the facilities, once the disabled person no longer used the property-this would be considered by Officers.

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