

POLICY AND RESOURCES/ CABINET SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

(Council Chamber - Port Talbot Civic Centre)

Members Present:

20 February, 2018

Chairperson: Councillor A.N.Woolcock

Vice Chairperson: Councillor S.Rahaman

Councillors: C.Edwards, S.E.Freeguard, M.Harvey,
S.K.Hunt, A.Llewelyn, S.Miller, S.M.Penry,
L.M.Purcell and S.Paddison

Officers In Attendance S.Phillips, H.Jenkins, A.Evans, D.Rees,
Mrs.K.Jones and A.Manchipp

Cabinet Invitees: Councillors R.G.Jones, A.J.Taylor, C.Clement-
Williams, D.W.Davies, D.Jones, E.V.Latham,
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 report of the Corporate Directors' Group in relation to the Budget Proposals for 2018/19 as it relates to CCTV as he works for the South Wales Police.
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2. **BUDGET PROPOSALS FOR 2018/19**

Committee received the report of the Corporate Directors' Group on the Budget Proposals for 2018/19. Members noted that the report had been updated as a result of additional monies received from Welsh Government. In addition the Director of Finance and

Corporate Services advised that Welsh Government had given a 2 year indicative budget, with a further -1% for 2019/20. Also more of the specific grants were now included in the settlement.

Members then made the following comments:-

- The low increase in the Authority's Council Tax (3.7%) was welcomed.
- ELL802 Celtic Leisure savings - The reduction in savings from £100k to £50k was raised and Members were advised that the Sports Council for Wales was out for consultation in relation to the Swimming Grant and that should this be cut it would impact on Celtic Leisure. In relation to the Aberafan Seafront as a whole the Chief Executive advised that the area had seen an increase in the number of visitors and that it was necessary to maintain this going forward. The Pontardawe Swimming Pool, run by Celtic Leisure, needed investment as the pool was old and needed upgrading. The situation in relation to Celtic Leisure would continue to be monitored closely.
- The proposal to retain the free Christmas parking was supported, however Members felt that the £3.50 charge at the Gnoll Country Park could result in indiscriminate parking outside nearby houses and the possibility that emergency services would be prevented from accessing. Members asked whether consideration could be given to placing double yellow lines on nearby streets and to increase policing by the Authority. Officers advised that the proposals would result in an additional income of £30k and that the charges would also cover events at the Park. In addition Members were reminded that income generation would play an increasing part in setting the budget going forward. Officers would look at ways of reducing/eliminating the potential problem of off street parking. Some Members felt that, in relation to the parking charges at the Gnoll, the cost of a season ticket of £52 was good value at an average cost of £1 per week.
- Members asked whether the 2018/19 pay award for staff had been finalised and were advised that the Trade Unions were currently consulting their Membership. It was anticipated that the Trade Unions would respond in March.
- The report referred to 'savings and efficiencies', some Members felt that these should be referred to as 'cuts', in order to highlight to members of the public the year on year financial pressures on the Authority by Welsh Government. The Director of Finance and Corporate Services agreed that going forward

the definitions should change to either 'cuts' or 'income generation' as appropriate.

- In relation to the delegation of Fees and Charges to Corporate Directors, some Members were not happy with this proposal. The Director however advised that this had been a longstanding recommendation, to assist in the operational issues around services particularly where notice of increases needed to be given.
- Members queried whether the anticipated savings of a. £950k through the introduction of Direct Payments and b. £100k through Community Based Mental Health Services were achievable? Members were advised that this Authority was leading the way in Wales with a view to the use of Direct Payments, however it was not yet known whether the £950k savings would be realised. If not then the savings would be found elsewhere in the Directorate. Members noted that there were issues around the integrated mental health teams, however this would not have an impact on the proposed savings. Lower level support commissioning would be brought forward.
- In relation to the Asset Based approach Members asked whether it would realise the anticipated £685k and what would be the position if this did not happen. Officers advised that work was ongoing to address this.
- In relation to Pontardawe Arts Centre, Members felt that this provided a valuable service to the Social Services, Health and Wellbeing Directorate in relation to the early intervention and prevention service and referred to the cut in subsidy proposed by the Authority. The Chief Executive advised that the initial proposal to cut the subsidy had been in discussion for over 12 months. It was now necessary that Business Cases for Pontardawe Arts Centre, Cefn Coed and Margam Park be developed as soon as possible. Members were reminded that the Friends of Pontardawe Arts Centre were able to apply for grants that the Authority was unable to access. Members asked that, as the Friends of the Centre was a relatively new Group, the cut in subsidy be deferred for 12 months? The Chief Executive advised that the Authority required a firm proposal for the Centre, but confirmed that Officers would work with the Friends to develop the Business Case and to identify funding streams.

(At this point in the meeting Councillor A.Llewelyn disclosed an interest in the item as he represents the Council on the Fire Authority.)

- Members felt that the Authority should promote the good work and services it provides and that it supports financially such outside bodies as the Fire Authority.
- Members asked how the percentage increase in Council Tax compared with other Local Authorities and were advised that this information was not yet available.
- In relation to ENV21, Members asked what the implications were for the Environment Directorate following the decision not to allocate a further one off grant and were advised that the allocation in the 2017/18 financial year had been a one off grant for improvements to roads and footpaths, grass cutting and street cleansing throughout the County Borough area.
- Members noted that the General Reserves had increased from £17.34m to over £20m and asked if some of the £3m additional Reserves could be used to off set the increase in parking charges at the Gnoll, or Cefn Coes Museum of the reduction in subsidy for the Pontardawe Arts Centre? Officers advised that this was due to a better than expected Settlement and the 98% collection rate in Council Tax. Going forward additional finances would be required to support the Member's Community Fund and the work on tourism. It was noted that Reserves had been utilised for such things as the landslips at both Pantteg and Cwmavon Road.
- Members asked whether the Fire Authority had responsibility for culverts and agreed that increased liaison was required with the Fire Authority to provide a more effective service.

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

3. **CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2018/19 TO 2020/21**

Members considered the report of the Head of Financial Services in relation to the above and were pleased with the work carried out to date and to the funding accessed.

Members noted, in particular, the progress of the Neath Town Centre Regeneration Project.

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

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

Committee received the report of the Director of Finance and Corporate Services in relation to the above. Members asked how accurate were the Authority's Consultants, Link Asset Services, in relation to the creditworthiness information it provided and were advised that the information provided was useful to the Authority, with good short term predictions.

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

CHAIRPERSON