

CABINET SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

(Council Chamber - Port Talbot Civic Centre)

Members Present:

27 November, 2018

Chairperson: Councillor A.N.Woolcock

Vice Chairperson: Councillor S.Rahaman

Councillors: M.Crowley, M.Harvey, N.T.Hunt, S.K.Hunt, L.Jones, S.A.Knoyle, S.Miller, S.Paddison, S.M.Penry, L.M.Purcell and A.L.Thomas

Officers In Attendance: S.Phillips, K.Jones, C.Griffiths, D.Giles, H.Jones, S.Rees and T.Davies

Cabinet Invitees: Councillors C.Clement-Williams and P.D.Richards

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

Councillor L.C.Jones - Agenda Item 2 - Report of the Director of Finance and Corporate Services, Consultation on Corporate Services Budget and Draft Savings 2019/20 – as she is employed by DANSA.

Councillor M.Harvey - Agenda Item 2 - Report of the Director of Finance and Corporate Services, Consultation on Corporate Services Budget and Draft Savings 2019/20 – as he is employed by South Wales Police.

- Councillor S.Miller - Agenda Item 2 - Report of the Director of Finance and Corporate Services, Consultation on Corporate Services Budget and Draft Savings 2019/20 – as her niece is employed by the Local Authority.
- Councillor A.N.Woolcock - Agenda Item 2 - Report of the Director of Finance and Corporate Services, Consultation on Corporate Services Budget and Draft Savings 2019/20 – as his niece is employed as a Training and Development Support Manager within the Local Authority.
- Councillor S.Rahaman - Agenda Item 2 - Report of the Director of Finance and Corporate Services, Consultation on Corporate Services Budget and Draft Savings 2019/20 – as he is a Local Authority representative (and secretary) for the Neath Port Talbot Black and Minority Ethnic Community Association.

2. **CONSULTATION ON CORPORATE SERVICES BUDGET AND DRAFT SAVINGS 2019/2020**

As part of the public consultation on the 2019/20 budget proposals, Committee considered the report of the Director of Finance and Corporate Services, as it related to the Corporate Services budget.

The Chief Executive gave an overview of the background of the report, and advised that since the circulated report had been written, Welsh Government had confirmed that on 19 December, an extra £13 million would be allocated to Local Authorities within Wales, which would equate to approximately £750,000 for each Authority – the details of this would be reported to Members after Christmas. It was noted that this would not solve the budget deficit or negate the need for the proposed savings within the circulated report. It was highlighted that a lot of small services budgets (such as Human

Resources, Legal Services and so on) are now made up almost entirely of staffing costs.

ICT Division

The ICT Service Manager (who would be taking over as the Head of ICT in 2019 following the retirement of the current Head of Service) advised Members that the ICT budget savings proposals for 2019/20 were predominantly made up of staffing costs. Some longstanding members of staff were retiring, to be replaced by staff starting lower down on the pay scale. Members queried if there were any plans to reduce the amount of staff working within the IT Service Desk, and noted that currently managers were looking at how they could do things differently, such as analysing data and identifying peaks periods.

Members queried whether staffing reductions within the ICT Division could have an effect on digital services; learning within schools and so on. Officers explained that succession management was in place as well as extra training being rolled out. It was confirmed that the IT Service Desk supports schools as well as Civic and other Council buildings. Members felt the out of hours IT help team provided valued support when Members had issues with their computer equipment, and were pleased to note that there were currently no plans to reduce this service. It was noted that a voice recognition system was currently being trialled.

Corporate Strategy and Democratic Services Division

The Assistant Chief Executive and Chief Digital Officer gave an overview of the Corporate Strategy and Democratic Services Division section of the circulated report. It was noted that although the CCTV service was not statutory, Officers were trying to identify new ways to sustain the service on a different footing, such as diversifying the use of the control room. Members queried whether the CCTV cameras could be left in place, should the system need to be decommissioned, and Officers explained that although it would not be possible to leave dummy cameras in place, an option would be to have the cameras recording, without anyone monitoring them in the control room. Members were concerned that the valuable work done around community safety and partnership should not be undone, and discussed the provision of CCTV in valley areas, as well as the possibility of working with private enterprises to have cameras recording cars entering and leaving valley communities.

It was noted that this would be a good opportunity to revisit the Authority's strategy on CCTV. The Police give no monies toward the CCTV service and do not assist the Authority with maintaining the system – Members felt the annual precept paid to the Police should be revisited on the basis of this. The Chief Executive would speak to the Police and Crime Commissioner about CCTV in Neath Port Talbot.

CCTV as a potential source of income generation was suggested by Members, as well as discussions with the business community of Neath Port Talbot around possible contributions towards CCTV.

Members noted that although the management structure of the Authority was changing, expertise still needed to be maintained within service areas, so upskilling was critical. Members queried how the removal of the Port Talbot One Stop Shop had been decided upon, and noted that two thirds of callers go to Neath One Stop Shop, so the decision had been based on volume of visitors. Members were concerned about how callers with disabilities such as blindness would be able to use the new Skype facilities, and Officers explained that all customer service staff had already been given disabled services training.

Members queried how Pontardawe hub would fit into the changes, and noted that discussions were currently taking place between Officers of the Local Authority and Third Sector organisations within Pontardawe to encourage the promotion of online services as well as giving hands on help to members of the public, where appropriate. Members suggested this practice could be extended to Celtic Leisure.

Commercialisation, advertising and sponsorship were discussed, and Members noted that clearer proposals around these topics would be presented to Members in the New Year. It was noted that a corporate approach to these areas was needed.

Officers explained there were low levels of sickness in the Corporate Strategy and Democratic Services Division, but the need to support staff through the changes to maintain wellbeing and keep stress levels low, was emphasised. Officers highlighted the importance of manageable workloads, and the need for managers to ensure that their staff don't consistently work out of hours.

Members were encouraged to lobby Westminster regarding the budget cuts, and how this would affect services in their areas. It was noted that new models of service and technologies would be coming out in the next few years, which would be worth exploring.

Legal Services Division

Members noted a verbal amendment to page 15, under the heading 'Land Charges', the word 'Ceredigion' should instead read 'Neath Port Talbot'.

The Head of Legal Services explained that the decision to cancel some of the online resources used by Solicitors for research purposes, was due to the fact they were very expensive, and the information could be sourced from other packages already subscribed to by the Council. Extra in house training would also be provided. Officers highlighted that the option of joining with other Authorities to benefit from discounted deals had already been explored. Members discussed the workload on Local Authority Solicitors following the recent changes to the Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards, and noted that the volume of cases had increased.

It was noted that training within the Legal Service was an extremely expensive element – different ways of training was being explored, including sending one member of staff on a training course, who would then train others within the team on their return, as well as self-learning/teaching.

Members noted the sentence at the top of page 16 of the circulated report ('Any further significant reductions in staff numbers will result in services, either ceasing altogether, or being significantly reduced') and commented that the Authority would be exposing itself to more and more risk, should staffing levels within Legal Services be reduced further.

Human Resources Division

The Head of Human Resources advised Members that only 7% of the Human Resources Budget was made up of non-staffing costs. Members discussed the extra pressure put on the rest of the workforce each time a job was lost. Officers explained that a new Mental Health Strategy would be produced next year and that a stress at work risk assessment was available to all members of staff. The Chief Executive emphasised that it was important to find the right

balance between pressure on staff and quality of service provided, and the Authority needed to be smarter about doing things it don't need to need to do. The good relationships between the Local Authority and the Trade Unions was discussed.

Members discussed work structure charts and the Workforce Information Team, which had been set up three to four years ago to identify who the Council employed and in what role, as well as patterns of sickness and data management.

Finance Division

The Head of Finance advised Members that the Division had achieved over £800,000 of savings in the last three financial years, mainly through voluntary redundancy or the non-replacement of posts which had become vacant through natural turnover. Officers acknowledged that losing experienced staff would result in a loss of knowledge, however training measures and apprentice schemes were in place. It was noted that all funding for support for claimants of Universal Credit had now been allocated to the Citizens Advice Bureau, so the Authority would sign point anyone in need of help.

Other Directorate Management and Third Sector Grants, and Central Savings

Members discussed the impacts on crime and disorder, and noted that the functions that relate to crime and disorder continue to be supported.

CHAIRPERSON