

Cabinet Scrutiny Committee

(Via Microsoft Teams)

Members Present:

11 November 2020

Chairperson: **Councillor M.Harvey**

Councillors: S.E.Freeguard, N.T.Hunt, S.K.Hunt, D.Keogh, A.Llewelyn, S.Miller, R.Mizen, J.D.Morgan, S.Paddison, S.M.Penry, S.H.Reynolds and A.N.Woolcock

Officers In Attendance A.Evans, A.Jarrett, H.Jenkins, S.Phillips, C.Davies, C.Griffiths, K.Jones, N.Pearce, H.Jones, S.Brennan, T.Davies and C.Davies

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

1. Pre-decision Scrutiny

The Committee scrutinised the following cabinet items:

Revenue Budget Update and Monitoring Report Quarter 2 - 2020-21

The Committee was presented with the Revenue Budget Update and Monitoring Report for Quarter 2 of 2020-21.

In relation to Hillside, Members asked Officers for clarity around the losses and confirmation that the Council would be refunded for those losses by Welsh Government. It was detailed within the circulated report that the Council had already been refunded £467k for the period between April and June; the predicted overspend of £894k was calculated after taking the refund into account. Members were made aware that a claim of £2.3million had been submitted for the second quarter of this year (the period between July and September) and of that £2.3million, a further £326k would be allocated to Hillside. In terms of the additional costs, which totals to just over 500k, the Council would be submitting claims to Welsh Government on a quarterly basis; however, the money received would depend on how

much money they had left in the Local Authority Hardship Fund, and Officers would need to review whether the amount would be sufficient to deal with the overspend. It was asked if the Council would have to fund the remaining overspend, to which Officers stated that currently there could be an element the Council would have to fund unless Welsh Government provided sufficient funds in the second half of the year; Officers would continue to monitor this and pursue Welsh Government. Officers clarified that due to having reduced income to cover the fixed costs of running the facility, it had resulted in the projected loss for the remaining part of this year.

The circulated report detailed that Parking Services had an overspend of £903k and that no further funding would be available for loss of income arising from local policy decisions; Members asked for clarity on this and if there had been any indication of further funds being added to the Local Authority Hardship Fund to support Councils across Wales at this time. It was noted that any local authority would have to fund the additional costs / loss of income of the local decisions carried out; there were free parking arrangements in place for town centres in Neath Port Talbot through the month of July until the end of August and the fees were then re-introduced from 1 September 2020. Therefore, the period between July and August, Welsh Government wouldn't be providing any additional income. Similarly in terms of Aberavon seafront and other various locations, the parking charges were re-introduced from 1 August 2020, so there would be a period in July where Welsh Government wouldn't reimburse. It was stated that Welsh Government were prepared to accept calls for additional funding for reduced footfall and for the second quarter the Council had submitted a £181k claim for recovery. Officers added that the predicated overspend of £903k was for the rest of financial year and should additional funding become available from Welsh Government, some of that overspend would be reimbursed.

Following on from this in relation to potential further funds, it was stated that initially, in the first supplementary budget, Welsh Government made available £180+ million worth of additional funding for local government; this had now been increased to £490million and they had also provided additional top ups, for example extending Free School Meals through the school holidays. It was noted that there was currently £510million included within the Local Authority Hardship Fund which may continue to increase should further lockdowns occur and if the financial capacity was there to do so.

Members asked if the issue around homelessness had provided the Council with any financial impacts in the recent months and if not, were Officers anticipating that it could do so going forward. It was confirmed that homelessness did provide additional pressures as the Council had put homeless individuals in specific accommodation since the outbreak of the pandemic in March; however most of the additional costs of this had been reimbursed through the monthly submitted claims. It was added that the Council had also been making bids to Welsh Government for additional capital investment to enable further improvements for the homelessness service over the remaining part of the year.

Concerns were raised in relation to the financial impact that Hillside had had on the Council, to which Officers stated that normally the facility would be fully occupied during the year, however as a result of Covid 19 there were now restrictions on how many people could be placed there, which had affected the income level; normally Hillside wouldn't have a financial impact on the Council.

Members asked for further information on the Princess Royal Theatre overspend; all theatres had been closed since April 2020 and were unlikely to open before the next financial year, as a result there was a loss of income, even though the Council had made some savings on costs, as no income was generated due to them being closed. It was confirmed that the Council had been refund £76k for the Princess Royal Theatre between April and June; the predicted net loss of income for the remaining part of the year was £62k. Officers added that all theatres in Neath Port Talbot were affected by this; the impact on the Pontardawe Arts Centre was smaller than that on the Princess Royal Theatre so wasn't mentioned in the circulated report and the Gwyn Hall had been successful in making a bid for grant aid of £207k for this year to compensate for their loss of income. Officers confirmed that the Council had included a bid within the £2.3million for the second quarter, and included monies for the extra three months (July to September) for the Princess Royal Theatre and other theatres in Neath Port Talbot; it was added that it was a different funding stream to what the Gwyn Hall had used.

The Cabinet Member for Finance clarified that when an overspend had been mentioned in the circulated report, it would on occasion be referring to income that the Council had lost and not always the Council overspending money in the particular service; the Cabinet Member had been in contact with Julie James MS and was meeting

with Cabinet Ministers regularly to discuss the issues around funding. Members were also informed that the chancellor had cancelled the three-year spending review this year, but would be making a statement on 25 November 2020.

The Committee thanked all of the staff in Finance Services for their work throughout the Covid 19 pandemic.

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

Afan Forest Park Visitor Centre - Valleys Regional Park Gateway Project

Members received a report on the Afan Forest Park Visitor Centre, Valleys Regional Park Gateway Project.

It was asked whether Officers could consider adding electronic vehicle charging points into the details of the project as it would be a missed opportunity to not include them. Officers confirmed that there were plans to put in at least one or two electronic vehicle charging points, however they were currently working on the capacity as the charging points required a lot more power and there would also need to be additional lighting and hook-ups for the motor homes. It was added that Officers were also working on a wider strategy in relation to electronic vehicle charging points which included introducing them into the public areas across the County Borough.

In relation to the designated play area, it was noted that there wasn't a large amount of area to work with due to the requirements of the placement, including that it needed to be in view of the café area for adults to monitor the children; however adventure play had come up with some designs which would be considered and the play area will be disabled friendly which had also been worked into the design.

Members asked if there was expectations of a high take-up of the motor homes and if so, could additional hook-ups be included if the demand was there; it was noted that it was difficult to predict the take-up, however bookings for motor home sites had been in high demand recently and there had been inquiries previously. Officers confirmed that they would be testing the market to see whether this could be replicated in other areas.

Officers were asked how much involvement the local Members had in the delivery of the project; the project had to be developed in a short space of time due to being approached in October 2020 which meant

that there wasn't an extensive consultation period and the details were developed from the experience of the Officers within Tourism based on what has previously been mentioned in the past. However in the wider sense, there will be opportunity for engagement with the local Members of the Afan Valley as there was a proposal with National Resource Wales (NRW) around a master plan for the Afan Valley.

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

2. **Access to Meetings**

RESOLVED: that pursuant to Section 100A(4) and (5) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded for the following items of business which involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 14 of Part 4 of Schedule 12A to the above Act.

3. **Pre-Decision Scrutiny of Private Item/s**

The Committee scrutinised the following private Cabinet item:

Demolition of Properties

Members were presented with a private report on the demolition of the properties highlighted in the circulated report.

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

CHAIRPERSON