

ENVIRONMENT AND HIGHWAYS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

(Committee Rooms A/B - Neath Civic Centre)

Members Present:

6 November 2015

Chairperson: Councillor I.D.Williams

Councillors: D.W.Davies, Mrs.R.Davies, S.K.Hunt, R.Phillips and S.Rahaman

Officers In Attendance Mrs.N.Pearce, M.Roberts, D.Griffiths, Mr. S Cook, N.Evans, S.Davies and A.Lewis

1. **CONSULTATION ON ENVIRONMENT DIRECTORATE BUDGET AND DRAFT SAVINGS 2016/17 AND 2017/18**

Members considered the report on the Environment Directorate Budget and Draft Savings for 2016/2017 and 2017/2018.

Members were advised that there would be an opportunity to discuss each budget proposal.

Increased income from roundabout sponsorship

Members were informed that whilst the saving identified was £3,000 however, the level of income that could be achieved would be £20,000 but there is a shortfall of £17,000 so the saving would be £3,000. Members asked how this would be achieved. Officers confirmed that the service would not be managed in house.

Members asked for further clarity on whether there is sufficient demand and how competitive would the service be. Officers confirmed that the service is comparable to external providers and there is sufficient demand.

Members asked if they could be advised when the sponsorship packages had been developed so that they can circulate within their communities.

Car parking

Officers stated that the figure of £30,000 would not be derived from an increase in tariff but from a reduction in tariffs with a view to increasing car park usage and hopefully an overall net gain through purchases of extended parking stays which would also help support the retailers.

Members stated that they welcomed the overall way forward but shared concern that changes cannot be made for Pontardawe. It was noted that Pontardawe had lower parking tariffs when compared to the rest of the Borough even after the reduced tariffs, with the exception of the all-day charge. Members also raised concern that there appeared to be counter logic in that the Department proposed to reduce charges now but proposed to charge for Christmas car parking in 2017. Members were advised that the reduced tariff all year was a greater overall subsidy.

Members were also advised that if the Business Improvement District was approved in Neath then the new body may also decide to assist with subsidised parking at Christmas.

Trade Waste

Members were advised that the increase in the trade waste charges would be at the rate of inflation plus 3%. Members asked whether the service was competitive enough to maintain the income levels. Officers replied that costs need to be recovered and the Council publishes its charges which businesses can compare to private sector providers. Officers stated that sometimes the Council loses customers but also gains some, and that the Council requires its customers to recycle given the statutory targets. The service envisages that more businesses will return to the Council service once new legislation is introduced that businesses will need to separate their waste for recycling.

Bulk Collections

Members raised their concern in relation to the proposed increase from £15 to £20 for the collection of bulky items. Members asked how many items could be collected and were advised that following a systems review a fair use policy had been developed. This was controlled in practice by limiting the number of entries to 7 on the

booking system (albeit one entry could be, for example, a table and 4 chairs) after which people would need to contact the Council where Contact Centre staff have the authority to exercise judgement. Members stated that there appeared to be some confusion as some members of the public had been advised that it was a maximum of 7 but the Head of Streetcare confirmed this is incorrect and the matter would be raised with the Contact Centre Manager. Members asked whether the Council signposts to Enfys and it was confirmed that their details are included on the Council's website.

Drainage

Members asked whether there was sufficient resilience in the service to allow for a reduction in staff costs. Members were advised that in relation to design and the fact that people were not being trained this would likely result in buying services in when required but it was highlighted that the costs of this would be included in any individual project costs.

Members enquired whether there would be any compulsory redundancies. It was confirmed that three officers were leaving, one to voluntary redundancy, one on early redundancy due to ill health and the other was retiring.

Waste Policy

Members were advised that the Department had been required to explore every option to identify savings to balance the budget. It was decided that as the Welsh Government now develops the majority of the policy in relation to waste that this post was not required.

Members asked whether the officer was leaving the Council. Officers confirmed that the person was currently on the at risk register and suitable alternative employment was being investigated.

Streetcare – Reduction in supervision costs

Members stated that the public appreciate the need to make cuts would this proposed saving result in a decrease in performance which will see the public become frustrated. As stated in the report the level of reduction will relate to the level of service reduction finally agreed. The level of supervision needs to remain commensurate with the level and type of work.

Management of Stray Dogs

Members asked what this saving actually entailed. Officers stated the intention was to reduce the level of service in line with minimum requirements moving from a proactive to more reactive service. As part of the review of synergies between the Environment Directorate and Environmental Health & Trading standards, the benefits of drawing together the dog warden and pest control services was also being considered. Members were further advised that a more detailed report would be presented to a future meeting once the consultation had been completed.

Due to the need to consider an urgent item that required a Cabinet Board decision the Committee agreed to suspend the consideration of the budget proposals.

Parking Review 2015-16

Members considered the report that provided information following the recent parking review.

Members were advised that the proposals were to reduce the cost of the off street parking tariffs; change Milland Road to a short stay car park and to provide free parking during Christmas 2015.

Members asked how a reduction in parking fees could result in more income. Officers stated that the logic was to increase overall usage and to encourage longer stays in town centres and to hopefully achieve a small net gain in income. Whilst it was seen as a risk. It was noted that it was for a trial period only and if unsuccessful would have to revert to the current charges at year end. This will be the subject of a mid-year review to be reported back Board.

Clarification was sought on the rationale behind changing Milland Road car park to short stay. Officers stated that this would provide more flexibility to visitors and could result in increased usage whilst supporting businesses in the southern end of the Town.

Following Scrutiny the Committee was supportive of the proposals to be considered by the Cabinet Board.

The Committee returned to the original business of the meeting and continued to consider the budget proposals.

Canals

Members considered the savings proposed in relation to Canals and a request was made that the savings in 16/17 be put back to 17/18 to allow further consideration of options whilst, in compensation, the proposal in relation to Public Convenience was brought forward. Members agreed with the recommendation and Officers stated they will consider the request along with other consultation responses.

Bowls Pavilions

Members asked whether any discussion had been held with the bowls clubs. Members were advised that officers are drawing the clubs attention to the proposals and ongoing consultation, to secure any feedback.

Neighbourhood Services

Members were advised that the service now only had one welder and there was a need to reduce the budget. Concern was raised that due to changes in this service area it had resulted in the need to use private companies. It was confirmed that this had been the case for example in holidays and to cover peaks in work but further noted that the companies were all local. Members were further advised that other reasons behind the need for budget savings was the maintenance costs in relation to the equipment such as the van and the welding shop.

2017/2018 Savings Proposals

Members considered the proposals for the 2017/2018 financial year. Whilst Members were generally supportive of the proposals Members requested that they would like to consider the proposals when they had been further developed and contained more detailed information.

Following scrutiny the report was noted.

CHAIRPERSON