

ECONOMIC AND COMMUNITY REGENERATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

(Committee Rooms A/B - Neath Civic Centre)

Members Present:

21 October 2016

Chairperson: Councillor A.Llewelyn

Councillors: M.Crowley, A.Jenkins, Mrs.S.Paddison and
A.Taylor

**Officers In
Attendance** S.Brennan, Mrs.N.Pearce, S. Curran, C.Millis,
P.Walker and Mrs.C.Darracott

Cabinet Invitees: Councillors A.J.Taylor

1. **CONSULTATION ON EDUCATION, LEISURE AND LIFELONG
LEARNING BUDGET AND DRAFT SAVINGS 2017/18**

The Committee received the supplementary information concerning the savings proposals for the Education, Leisure and Lifelong Learning Budget, set out in the Cabinet Report of 28 September 2016, with a view to aiding the scrutiny of those proposals, as detailed within the circulated report.

Members were provided with more details of the specific proposals for the Services that were under the remit of this Committee. It was highlighted that some items had been agreed in previous Financial Plans and the additional detail was only in relation to new proposals.

ELLL705 Vacancy Management

This saving will be achieved by closely monitoring all aspects when considering replacing staff and not filling jobs if appropriate. The ER/VR scheme is also being reopened.

Members asked if 'phased retirement' was being considered and discussed if more could be done to advertise the scheme. It was noted that contingency planning is important to ensure that expertise and knowledge within departments is not lost.

ELLL706 Increase Income Target- Neath and Port Talbot Work Programme

This saving will be achieved by increasing the income target for the Neath and Port Talbot Work Programme through continued improvement in service delivery and monitoring of contractual income.

ELLL707 Reduce Subsidy Pontardawe Arts Centre

This saving will be achieved by further reducing the funding to Pontardawe Arts Centre. Members asked for further information in relation to the impact this reduction would have on the centre. The programme that is delivered and the opening times were discussed and it was noted that consideration of the programme for all three Theatre/Art Centre venues will be considered as a whole. Members asked about the links between the Arts Centre and the Celtic Community Leisure contract and discussed the potential advantages of having the theatres run by the same provision.

ELLL708 Reduce Subsidy Gwyn Hall Theatre

This saving will be achieved by further reducing the funding to the Gwyn Hall ensuring more efficient management of the Celtic Leisure contract. Members asked for further information on this and discussed exploring options such as volunteers to ensure the contract is fit for purpose. Members were pleased to note the profitable café and catering provision at the Gwyn Hall and welcomed following this service model in other areas to emulate its success.

ELLL709 Restructure Service due to changes in level of Service Provision

This saving will be achieved by the re structure of existing support service functions.

ELLL710 Innovative Use of Grant Funding

This saving will be achieved by the innovative use of grant funding looking into further use of digital technology whilst remaining within grant conditions.

ELLL711 Further reduction in subsidy to Aberafan Seafront/Lifeboat Service.

Members were notified that this should read 'Aberafan Lifeguard Service'. It was noted that this is a contentious issue and Members commented that the service provides invaluable support particularly in line with the work being undertaken to promote tourism and visitors to the area.

Members asked what percentage the £5k of savings represents of the subsidy that the Council provides the service; officers explained it represented a 2.5% reduction.

Members were disappointed to comment that this savings requirement represents the 'bare bones' of savings that each department is now having to consider in an attempt to meet the budget gap.

This savings target was not supported by Members, particularly in line with the investment to Aberafan Sea Front as a family destination.

Members raised the issue of staff paying to park within the Council; it was noted that whilst staff who work in Civic Buildings are members of the NPT Staff Car Parking Scheme and are required to pay to park in the multi storey car parks staff who work at outlying buildings and schools are not required to pay to park and concern was raised that this is not an equitable situation.

It was requested that the issue of staff paying to park in schools and outlying buildings be further considered as part of the budget proposals.

Following scrutiny, it was agreed that the report be noted.

2. **CONSULTATION ON ENVIRONMENT BUDGET AND DRAFT SAVINGS 2017/18**

The Committee received the supplementary information concerning the savings proposals for the Environment Budget, set out in the Cabinet Report of 28 September 2016, with a view to aiding the scrutiny of those proposals, as detailed within the circulated report.

Members were provided with more details of the specific proposals for the Services that were under the remit of this Committee. It was

highlighted that some items had been agreed in previous Financial Plans and the additional detail was only in relation to new proposals.

The Committee were informed that the following saving strategies have been removed, because they have been identified as at risk and have been replaced:

ENV513 (£75K) – Non-replacement of staff on retirement. Any savings of this nature will be shown against the service in future instead of as a general savings target

ENV628 (£61K) — It is not considered feasible to further decrease the staff with the Estates section, given the volume of staff that have previously left this service area and the increased work and activity necessary with Tata, the Enterprise Zone and the Swansea Bay City Region

ENV630 (£33K) — It is not considered feasible to reduce staff costs further within the Employment Support Section, given the volume of staff that have previously left this service area and the increased work and activity necessary with Tata, the Enterprise Zone and the Swansea Bay City Region.

The Committee agreed that it was not feasible to reduce staff numbers any further in the above area and were pleased to note the inclusion of this in the budget strategies.

Stress and sickness absence was discussed and the impact of reducing resources on the remaining members of staff. Similarly, it was noted that if the remaining members of staff take up additional work this can be considered under the Job Evaluation appeal process which can lead to increased costs for the section due to larger salaries being agreed at appeal.

Members were informed that the following new savings targets are proposed:

ENV707 (£? K) – Service reviews of both the coffee shops and the building cleaning services are underway to ascertain if additional savings are feasible.

ENV708 (£?) - It is planned to carry out a service reviews of the Planning service. Any savings will be reported once the review is completed.

Members asked for further information in relation to the service reviews.

In terms of coffee shops and building cleaning services options were discussed such as consideration of integration with other services or exploring 'area based' models. Members were pleased to note that the reviews would consider all options and looked forward to receiving more information as the reviews progressed.

Members noted the coffee shop at the Quays and stated that the location is convenient for the coastal path and dock areas. It was requested that the planned review consider the increased marketing of the coffee shop to the public in an attempt to increase income.

In terms of the service review for the Planning Service Members discussed the focus of reducing costs whilst achieving targets and recognised the financial penalties that would be incurred if certain targets are not met.

The impact of reducing resources in other departments was noted for example the effect on the planning service when experts in other areas such as drainage or highways who provide advice on planning applications leave the Council. Members welcomed that this should be considered as part of the overall review.

Members suggested an internal portal or web presence be established for consultation within the whole Council for when a post is being deleted from the Council structure to allow those departments which it will effect to be aware.

It was noted that contingency planning and resilience is important to ensure that expertise and knowledge within departments is not lost and concern was raised at the limitation of recruiting younger external candidates who can develop a career path within the Council.

Further concern was raised in terms of losing staff to the private sector who offer higher salaries for similar roles.

The Cabinet Member thanked the Scrutiny Committee for their comments and insight into the proposed budget savings.

Following scrutiny, it was agreed that the report be noted.

CHAIRPERSON