

STREETSCENE AND ENGINEERING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

(Committee Rooms A/B - Neath Civic Centre)

Members Present:

10 December 2018

Chairperson: Councillor S.M.Penry

Vice Chairperson: Councillor S. ap Dafydd

Councillors: A.R.Aubrey, N.J.E.Davies, W.F.Griffiths,
A.McGrath, R.W.Wood and J.Hale

Officers In Attendance J.Davies, D.Griffiths, M.Roberts and S Cook

Cabinet Invitees: Councillors A. Wingrave and E.V.Latham

1. CONSULTATION ON ENVIRONMENT DIRECTORATE'S BUDGET AND DRAFT SAVINGS FOPR 2019/20

1.1 901 Parking Tariff Increase

Officers informed the committee of the proposed additional 30p charge to the parking tariff structure. Officers explained that the charge would only be applied from the third hour onwards and that it would not apply to the first two hours. Officers added it was estimated that this budget proposal would generate £30,000.

Members questioned why the charging tariff at the car parks in Pontardawe were different to the rest of the county borough, and were there plans to bring them all in line with each other. Members added that the first hour of parking was offered for free in the car parks in Pontardawe. Officers informed the committee that the arrangement in Pontardawe was a historic position, whereby the Chamber of Trade had previously put a case forward to the Council in order to attract customers to the town centre. Officers added that the current arrangement would be reviewed in future.

Members questioned what data was used when determining the cost modelling for the car parks. Officers stated that the cost modelling

was based on data for each car park and that usage was a key consideration. Officers reported that a spreadsheet had been set up which gave the projected figures based on the uplift entered into the relevant fields. Officers stated that a ten to thirty percent risk element had been applied to any future forecasts to take into account potential decreases in usage due to the increase in charges.

Following scrutiny, the committee were supportive of the budget proposal.

1.2 902 Increased income from Neath Inspired or car park usage

Officers informed the committee that the Council were two years into the partnership agreement with Neath Inspired, which was aimed to increase footfall into the Neath town centre. Officers stated that the Council had offered subsidised parking initiatives to Neath Inspired such as the 'free after three' parking initiative, and for events such as the Neath Food and Drink Festival, Real Ale Festival and the Neath Great Guitar Gig, which Neath Inspired contributed to. Officers explained that the Council aimed to reduce the parking subsidy on 'free after three.'

Following scrutiny, the committee were supportive of the budget proposal.

1.3 903 Engineering & Transport Cost Saving

Officer informed the committee that there were two members of staff who had indicated that they wished to take early retirement, but were still awaiting their figures. Members questioned that with staff leaving and not being replaced, was this placing pressure on remaining team members. Officers stated that the volume of work was the issue with less resources available to carry out tasks; however this was an issue encountered across the entire directorate. Officers added that the capacity to respond swiftly had been affected, and that some tasks would have to take longer to be dealt with.

Following scrutiny, the committee were supportive of the budget proposal.

1.4 904 - Highways Development Control

Officers explained that the way the department charged for staff time

would be altered to help absorb staff costs. Officers added that the Council would be charging for elements of the service that it was not currently charging for which would maximise income.

Following scrutiny, the committee were supportive of the budget proposal.

1.5 905 - Car Parking Permits

Officers informed the committee that this matter had been previously considered by the committee at the meeting on the 19th October, and decision has been taken by Cabinet Board. Officers updated Members that around £400 had been generated from selling permits to parents at Alderman Davies Primary School so far, but the Police had not purchased any to date.

Following scrutiny, the committee were supportive of the budget proposal.

1.6 906 - Staff & Member Parking Charges

Officers stated that the proposal was not technically an increase, as when the Workforce Agreement was in being staff agreed to a 50% freeze on pay rises in return for a reduction to staff parking permits from £16 to £12. Officers added that the agreement came to an end in April 2018, and that the proposal merely restores the price as it would have been if the agreement had not been put in place. Officers informed the committee that a car parking permit behind the barrier in Port Talbot Civic Centre costs £19 a month.

Following scrutiny, the committee were supportive of the budget proposal.

1.7 907 - Road Safety & Business Performance

Officers informed the committee that there were two crossing sites that were no longer required; one was due to the introduction of a pelican crossing, and the other was no longer considered a safe route to school as a result of a review undertaken as part of the School Improvements Programme. Officers explained that the individuals affected were keen to retire, and the redundancy payment was considered minimal.

Following scrutiny, the committee were supportive of the budget proposal.

1.8 918 - Pest Control

Officers explained that the cost of the service was currently too low, and that the Council needed to cover its costs as much as possible. Officers stated that the charge for the service was still more competitive than what was offered by businesses in the private sector. Officers added Pest Control is a non-statutory service.

Members queried how many staff were employed in the team. Officers stated that the function was shared with dealing with stray dogs and there are three Dog and Pest Enforcement Officers. Officers added that support could also be drawn from the Waste Enforcement Officers if required.

Following scrutiny, the committee were supportive of the budget proposal.

1.9 919 – Cemeteries

Officers explained that the proposal aimed to reduce subsidy for cemetery services by charging a higher rate. Officers added that the proposed charge was benchmarked against other authorities' costs and was considered to be in line with what other authorities were charging.

Following scrutiny, the committee were supportive of the budget proposal.

1.10 920 - Bowling Greens/sports fields

Officers informed the committee that following the asset transfer exercise carried out in previous years, there were 19 sites originally buying in maintenance services from the Council and this had now reduced to five. Officers added that the directorate could not justify bearing the staff costs to provide maintenance for five sites only, particularly when there were other organisations that could provide the service. With respect to the maintenance of sports fields, the cost needed to be increased to reduce the subsidy in order to protect statutory services.

Members commented that the Council should be encouraging citizens to participate in physical activity and that the proposal was depriving them of this facility. Officers stated that they saw no reason why any facilities would be lost as there were other cost effective

service providers, as evident from the number of clubs buying the Council service reducing from 19 to five. Officers reminded the committee that these grounds maintenance services were not a statutory requirement and that the Council needed to recover its costs as far as possible to protect statutory service areas.

1.11 921 - Greater cost recovery on Schools grounds maintenance income charges

Officers explained that the Environment Directorate were looking to recover costs for schools ground maintenance, and the proposed increase equated to £200 extra per school per annum on average.

Following scrutiny, the committee were supportive of the budget proposal.

1.12 924 - Savings arising from the cessation of the Print Commissioning function

Officers informed the committee that this was a corporate saving initiative.

Following scrutiny, the committee were supportive of the budget proposal.

CHAIRPERSON