

ENVIRONMENTAL & PUBLIC PROTECTION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MONDAY, 1ST FEBRUARY, 2021

PRESENT: Councillor J.D. James [Chair]

Councillors:

M. Charles, A. Davies, J. Davies, K. Davies, J. Gilasbey, T. Higgins, E. Morgan, D. Phillips, S. Phillips, A. Speake, D. Thomas and A. Vaughan-Owen

Also in attendance:

Councillor C. Campbell – Executive Board Member for Communities & Rural Affairs
Councillor H. Evans – Executive Board Member for Environment
Councillor D. Jenkins – Executive Board Member for Resources

The following Officers were in attendance:

R. Mullen – Director of Environment
R. Hemingway – Head of Financial Services
J. Morgan – Head of Homes & Safer Communities
S. Pilliner – Head of Transportation & Highways
A. Williams – Head of Waste & Environmental Services
R. Edmunds – Consumer & Business Affairs Manager
J. Edwards – Business Improvement Manager
K. Harrop – Community Safety Manager
R. James – Group Accountant
M. Evans Thomas - Principal Democratic Services Officer
E. Bryer - Democratic Services Officer
R. Lloyd - Democratic Services Officer
S. Rees - Simultaneous Translator
J. Corner - Technical Officer

Virtual Meeting : 10.00 am - 11.35 am

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from Councillor P. Edwards

2. DECLARATIONS OF PERSONAL INTEREST INCLUDING ANY PARTY WHIPS ISSUED IN RELATION TO ANY AGENDA ITEM.

There were no declarations of personal interest or of any party whips.

3. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

The Chair advised that no public questions had been received.

4. HALF YEAR PERFORMANCE REPORT 2020/21 (1ST APRIL TO 30TH SEPTEMBER 2020)

The Committee considered the 2020/21 Half Year Performance Report for the period 1st April to 30th September 2020.

The report detailed the progress made against the performance measures contained in the Corporate Strategy 2020/21. It was noted that, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, Departmental Action Plans for 2020/21 were not currently being monitored in order to enable services to focus on dealing with emergencies. Instead of monitoring actions set prior to the pandemic, a half year Covid-19 Community Impact Assessment had been produced and it was also intended to produce an annual report on the Corporate Strategy Wellbeing Objectives for 2020/21.

The following questions/observations were raised on the report:-

- Officers were asked if the present waste amnesty has led to a higher incident of fly tipping of hazardous waste. The Committee was informed that this was the case when the HWRC site was closed but there have been no problems since then;
- Reference was made to the fact that some measures are listed as having no target and officers were asked if this was just for the Covid period as it was difficult to scrutinise if there are no targets. The Head of Homes and Safer Communities confirmed that this was just for the Covid period as because of the circumstances the targets wouldn't really tell us anything during this period. He added that these targets will be re-visited.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the report be received.

5. REVENUE BUDGET STRATEGY CONSULTATION 2021/22 to 2023/24

The Committee considered the Council's Revenue Budget Strategy 2021/22 to 2023/24 which provided a current view of the revenue budget for 2021/2022 together with indicative figures for the 2022/2023 and 2023/2024 financial years. The report was based on officers' projections of spending requirements and took account of the provisional settlement issued by Welsh Government on the 22nd December, 2020. It also reflected current departmental submissions for savings proposals after taking account of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the delivery of those savings.

It was noted that, whilst significant work had already been undertaken in preparing the budget, this report represented an initial position statement which would be updated over the coming month as the budget was further developed, council members are engaged and public consultation takes place. The final settlement was due to be received from Welsh Government on 2nd March, 2021.

It was pointed out that Covid-19 has led not just to unprecedented additional costs but also to the collapse of important income, particularly during periods of lockdown. Taken together, it was anticipated that the combination of additional expenditure and income loss would have a £30 million impact on Carmarthenshire's current year budgets. Authorities have submitted monthly

claims, which have been assessed and to a very significant extent, fully refunded by WG. Looking ahead to next year, continued WG funding in this way has not been committed at this stage, not least because WG itself does not yet have funding confirmed as a consequence of Westminster Covid-19 related expenditure.

Although the Strategy proposed a 4.89% Council Tax increase for each of the three financial years, the Executive Board had recommended that the increase for 2021/22 be reduced to 4.48%. This recommendation would be considered by Council at its meeting to be held on 3rd March, 2021 when setting the Council Tax level for 2021/22. Additionally, the Welsh Government final settlement figure was to be announced on the 2nd March 2021 and any amendments required to be considered in relation to the Budget Strategy arising from that announcement would also be considered by Council on the 3rd March.

The Committee thereupon considered the following detailed budget information appended to the Strategy, relevant to its remit:-

- **Appendix A(i)** – Efficiency summary for the Environment and Public Protection Services
- **Appendix A(ii)** – Growth Pressures summary for the Environment Service
- **Appendix B** – Budget monitoring report for the Environment and Public Protection Services
- **Appendix C** – Charging Digest for the Environment and Public Protection Services

Whilst the budget proposals assumed the full delivery of all the savings proposals, together with the identification and delivery of the shortfall in savings proposals for the 2022/23 and 2023/24 financial years, further cost reductions would need to be identified for those latter years in order to maintain the current Budget Strategy and level of Council Tax. The savings to be identified in years 2 and 3 of the Strategy amounted to £1.96 million and departments would work over the forthcoming year to identify those savings

The following questions/observations were raised on the report:-

- Reference was made to the increase in telephone scams targeting the elderly and vulnerable during lockdown and officers were asked if there was any possibility of additional funding being provided to assist with the purchase of devices for the TrueCall service;
- Reference was made to the total of £60k efficiency savings identified in the Road Safety Unit which it was hoped to recoup via sponsorship and officers were asked if they are reasonably confident that money can be derived from sponsorship. The Head of Transportation & Highways explained that that proposal is in year 2 of the savings programme which allowed officers some time to work on the potential for sponsorship.
- Reference was made to the efficiency savings identified in Fleet Maintenance and the proposal to offset this by expanding the amount of chargeable work through MOTs and officers were asked how sensitive we are to small businesses who offer MOTs as we would not want to compete against them and put them out of business. The Head of Transportation & Highways explained that this is a service which receives many requests

from the public and this proposal was purely in response to a demand from the public;

- Reference was made to the reduction in the flood defence budget, whilst acknowledging that £5k was a relatively small amount, concern was expressed at this proposal given the fact that we are facing more severe weather and a changing climate. The Head of Waste and Environmental Services explained that £5k is a relatively small sum and would mean less small scale works, however, more funding is being received from Welsh Government on a scheme basis so there would be no detriment;
- Reference was made to the fact that the Waste Services budget had reduced by £55k due to the fact that grants have stopped and concern was expressed that that could happen to the flood defence grants referred to earlier;
- Reference was made to the proposed savings in Public Rights of Way and officers were asked how they intended to achieve the reduction in expenditure and how the current outstanding issues will be tackled. The Head of Transportation & Highways informed the Committee that the maintenance and legal teams have just merged and will be looking at the programme of interventions;
- Officers were asked how confident they are that any anticipated Welsh Government grants will be forthcoming. The Head of Financial Services explained that grants figures have been received from Welsh Government on an all Wales level. He added that the uncertainty is how public sector funding will change over the next couple of years;
- Reference was made to the big reduction in funding for winter gritting and whilst acknowledging that we have had very mild winters for the last 5-6 years, officers were asked if there is money available should we have a bad spell of icy/frosty weather. The Head of Transportation & Highways explained that in order to achieve the required efficiencies, the department has to prioritise accordingly. He added that we have had a lot of bad weather recently and the department has responded to that appropriately;
- Reference was made to the reduction in the road sweeping budget and the fact that last year there were 2-3 inches of dead leaves on rural roads which were washed into the gulleys after a period of heavy rain. Road sweepers are only able to do 2 loads in a day and officers were asked if more front end loaders could be used with 2 operatives which would result in far more clearing being achieved in a day. Officers were also asked if it would be possible to take the dead leaves to recycling centres for composting. The Head of Transportation & Highways explained that it is difficult to predict leaf fall every year and consequently officers have to be reactive unfortunately. With regard to the suggestion with regard to loading/picking up, he explained that it was a matter of availability of resources. He added that he would explore the idea of composting, however, he feared that there may be a contamination issue.

RESOLVED TO RECOMMEND TO THE EXECUTIVE BOARD

- 5.1 that the 2021/22–2023/24 Revenue Budget Strategy be received;**

- 5.2 that the Charging Digest for the Environment and Public Protection Services, as detailed in Appendix C to the report, be endorsed;**
- 5.3 that the possibility of allocating additional funding for the TrueCall Service be explored.**

In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 16.5 Councillor A. Speake requested that the fact that he abstained from voting on the above item be recorded in the minutes.

6. REVENUE AND CAPITAL BUDGET MONITORING REPORT 2020/21

The Committee considered the Revenue and Capital Budget Monitoring Report for the Environmental and Public Protection Services which provided an update on the latest budgetary position as at 31st October, 2020 in respect of 2020/21.

The following question was asked in relation to the report:-

- Reference was made to the number of vacant posts in the Public Protection Service and officers were asked if these have been advertised/filled. The Consumer and Business Affairs Manager explained that there has been a lot of staff movement to help the TTP team and the aim was to fill all vacant posts as soon as possible.

RESOLVED that the report be received.

7. EXPLANATION FOR NON-SUBMISSION OF SCRUTINY REPORT

The Committee received an explanation for the non-submission of the following scrutiny report:-

- Anti-Social Behaviour Policy

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the information be noted.

8. FORTHCOMING ITEMS

The Committee considered a list of items to be included on the agenda of the next meeting to be held on 5th March, 2021.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the information be noted.

9. TO SIGN AS A CORRECT RECORD THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COMMITTEE HELD ON THE 14TH DECEMBER 2020

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on the 14th December, 2020 be signed as a correct record.

CHAIR

DATE