

POLICY & RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 2 February 2022

PRESENT: Councillor A.G. Morgan (Chair);

Councillors:

S.M. Allen, K.V. Broom, D.M. Cundy, T.A.J. Davies, H.L. Davies, J.S. Edmunds, G.H. John, J.K. Howell, C. Jones, K. Madge, J.G. Prosser and D.E. Williams;

Also in attendance:

Councillor E. Dole, Leader of the Council;
Councillor J. Tremlett, Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet portfolio holder for Social Care and Health;
Councillor C.A. Davies, Cabinet Member for Communities and Rural Affairs;
Councillor G. Davies, Cabinet Member for Education & Children;
Councillor H.A.L. Evans, Cabinet Member for Environment;
Councillor L.D. Evans, Cabinet Member for Housing;
Councillor P.M. Hughes, Cabinet Member for Public Protection;
Councillor D.M. Jenkins, Cabinet Member for Resources;

The following Officers were in attendance:

R. Hemingway, Head of Financial Services;
J. Jones, Head of Regeneration;
H. Pugh, Head of Revenues and Financial Compliance;
P.R. Thomas, Assistant Chief Executive (People Management & Performance);
L.R. Jones, Head of Administration and Law;
G. Ayers, Corporate Policy and Partnership Manager;
A Clarke, Lead Business Partner (HR);
H. Font, Fitness for Work Manager;
D. Hockenhull, Marketing and Media Manager;
M. Jenkins, Strategic Digital Business Manager;
J. M. Williams, ICT Operations & Governance Manager;
J. N. Williams, Applications and Business Transformation Manager;
T. Thomas, Principal Business Development Officer;
S. Rees, Simultaneous Translator;
K. Thomas, Democratic Services Officer;
M.S. Davies, Democratic Services Officer.

Virtual Meeting: 10.00 am - 1.35 pm

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence.

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

Councillor	Minute No (s)	Nature of Interest
S.M. Allen	5 - Five Year Capital Programme (Council Fund) – 2022/23 to 2026/27 [Bus Bays at Ysgol Dyffryn Taf]	School Governor at Ysgol Dyffryn Taf;

T.A.J. Davies	9 - Corporate Services Departmental Business Plan 2022/23;	Sister-in-Law is Head of Revenues and Financial Compliance.
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3. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

No public questions had been received.

4. REVENUE BUDGET STRATEGY CONSULTATION 2022/23 TO 2024/25

The Cabinet Member for Resources presented the Revenue Budget Strategy 2022/23 to 2024/25 which had been endorsed by the Cabinet for consultation purposes at its meeting on 17th January 2022. The report, which provided Members with the current view of the Revenue Budget for 2022/2023 together with indicative figures for the 2023/2024 and 2024/2025 financial years, was based on officers' projections of spending requirements and took account of the provisional settlement issued by Welsh Government on 21st December 2021. It also reflected the current departmental submissions for savings proposals. The impact on departmental spending would be dependent upon the final settlement from Welsh Government and the resultant final Budget adopted by County Council.

The budget proposals, as presented in the report, assumed the full delivery of all of the savings proposals submitted, together with the identification and delivery of the shortfall in savings proposals 2023-24 and 2024-25. Further cost reductions would need to be identified for years 2023/24 and 2024/25 to be able to maintain the current Budget Strategy and level of council tax.

It was highlighted that the critical importance of minimising the Council Tax increase for residents whilst maintaining a balanced budget in these unprecedented and challenging times was recognised.

Given the scale of the pressures and forecasted budget gap, Council Tax increases had been maintained at the previous MTFP levels of 4.4% for next year, with the savings identified in years 2 and 3 leading to indicative Council Tax increases of 3.4% and 3.8% respectively. It was considered that this would provide at least some mitigation to the savings proposals which the council needed to consider over future years of the Medium-Term Financial Plan.

Amongst the issues raised during consideration of the report were the following:

- In response to concerns about the number of vacancies at the Customer Services Centres the Committee was advised that every effort was being made to fill the posts and 4 appointments had been made the previous week;
- The Head of Regeneration advised that a new lease had been agreed in regard to the Nant-y-Ci Livestock Market and it was likely that the first sale would take place in March;
- In response to a question the Head of Revenues and Financial Compliance stated that the Department was in the process of seeking to fill the vacant posts in the Housing Benefits Administration team.

RESOLVED to accept the report and endorse the Charging Digest.

5. FIVE YEAR CAPITAL PROGRAMME (COUNCIL FUND) - 2022/23 TO 2026/27

The Cabinet Member for Resources presented the 5-year capital programme which provided an initial view of the 5-year Capital Programme from 2022/23 to 2026/27. The report formed the basis of the budget consultation process with Scrutiny Committees and other relevant parties and any feedback, along with the final settlement, would inform the final budget report which would be presented to members in March 2022. The proposed capital programme was a capital spend of some £269m over the next 5 years and current funding proposals included external funding of £150m. The report highlighted the provisional settlement received from the Welsh Government which indicated capital funding of £10.037m for the Authority in 2022-23. The funding was made up of Unhypothecated Supported Borrowing of £5.942m and General Capital Grant of £4.095m. The new capital programme remained fully funded over the five-year period.

Amongst the issues raised during consideration of the report were the following:

- In response to the questioning of the £73m allocation to schools whilst the 21st Century Band 'B' proposals were being reviewed the Head of Financial Services advised that it was important to maintain that allocation to schools overall pending the outcome of the review;
- In response to a concern that no award had been made by Welsh Government for Highways Refurbishment funding the Head of Financial Services commented that the Authority's own Capital programme included an annual allocation of £600k and Cabinet was proposing to add £1m for 2022/3 which would help in some way but still result in a shortfall. The Leader stated that the Welsh Government was being lobbied on the matter by local authorities and the WLGA and he also recognised concerns regarding the lack of pavements in some areas and the need to highlight the issue particularly within the concept of active travel;
- the Cabinet Member for Education and Children, in response to a question, gave an assurance that the 21st Century Band 'B' schools project at Ammanford remained a priority.

RESOLVED that the Five-Year Capital Programme 2022/23 – 2026/27 be endorsed.

6. REVENUE & CAPITAL BUDGET MONITORING REPORT 2021/22

The Cabinet Member for Resources presented the Authority's Corporate Budget Monitoring Report and the Chief Executive's and Corporate Services departmental reports as at 31st October 2021 in respect of the 2021/22 financial year. The report also included an appendix detailing Savings Monitoring 2021-22.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED to receive the report.

7. TREASURY MANAGEMENT POLICY AND STRATEGY 2022-23

The Cabinet Member for Resources presented the proposed Treasury Management Policy and Strategy 2022/23 which would be considered by the Cabinet on the 21st February, 2022, and was reminded that, as part of the requirements of the revised CIPFA Code of Practice on Treasury Management, the Council was required to maintain a Treasury Management Policy detailing the policies and objectives of its treasury management activities, and to approve a Treasury Management Strategy annually prior to the commencement of the financial year to which it related. Additionally, under the provisions of the Local Government Act 2003, the Council was required to approve its Treasury Management Prudential Indicators for the coming year.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the Treasury Management Policy and Strategy for 2022/23 and associated appendices be endorsed.

8. CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S DEPARTMENTAL BUSINESS PLAN 2022/23

The Leader presented, for the Committee's consideration, the Chief Executive's Departmental Business Plan 2022-23 which outlined the priorities for the department and identified how they supported the 5 Ways of Working and the 7 Goals of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. It was noted that the plan was subject to change due to the impact of the pandemic and BREXIT which created a lot of uncertainty in future planning.

Amongst the issues raised during consideration of the report were the following:

- In response to a question on the Equal Pay Audit the Assistant Chief Executive (People Management & Performance) commented that an impact assessment was undertaken whenever there was a change in policy relating to terms and conditions to ensure that any change did not adversely affect the lower and impact on female employees more than male employees;
- It was emphasised that there had been a refocusing of Key Actions and Measures as a consequence of the pandemic to ensure workforce planning was integral to the way in which the Authority operated and sustainable.
- Reference was made to the work being undertaken with schools and sixth form colleges to communicate to pupils the range of jobs and career opportunities available with the Council.

Offices were again asked to convey to their teams the Committee's appreciation of their work during this difficult time.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED to note the Plan.

9. CORPORATE SERVICES DEPARTMENTAL BUSINESS PLAN 2022/23

[DURATION OF MEETING

At 1:00 p.m. during consideration of this item, the Committee's attention was drawn to Standing Order 9 'Duration of Meeting' and the fact that the meeting had been underway for 3 hours. It was therefore

RESOLVED to suspend Standing Orders to allow the remaining items on the agenda to be considered.]

The Cabinet Member for Resources presented, for the Committee's consideration, the Corporate Services Departmental Business Plan 2022-23 which outlined the priorities for the department and identified how they supported the 5 Ways of Working and the 7 Goals of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

The Head of Revenues & Financial Compliance, in response to a question, outlined the approaches being undertaken to counter fraud and corruption which was included on the Corporate Risk Register.

Offices were again asked to convey to their teams the Committee's appreciation of

their work during this difficult time.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED to note the Plan.

10. DIGITAL SCHOOLS & DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY STRATEGIES 2022-2025

The Cabinet Member for Education and Children presented the Digital Schools Strategy and the Digital Technology Strategy 2022-2025. The strategies had been revised and updated to set out the Council's strategic priorities to underpin the delivery of digital learning over the next 3 years, along with the direction of the digital technologies that would be adapted by the Council to underpin all digital services. Capital finance had been secured to deliver both strategies via the Council's capital program and the Welsh Government HWB grant.

Amongst the issues raised during consideration of the report were the following:

- It was noted that during lockdown pupils in households identified as having poor or no internet had been supplied with 4G internet 'dongles' via Welsh Government funding to enable them to access schoolwork though this scheme had ceased in July 2021. Schools had since been circulated with details of other internet options such as BT's Social Tariff available for eligible households. Officers agreed to clarify if households with an existing BT internet contract would need to end that contract before entering a BT Social Tariff contract;
- Members were advised to contact the clerk of a Governing Body in the first instance if they had any issues with regard to use of the HWB to access matters relating to a Governing Body they served on particularly where they served on more than one governing body;
- In response to a query members were informed that Disaster Recovery tests had taken place and would continue.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the strategies be endorsed.

11. SICKNESS ABSENCE MONITORING REPORT HALF YEAR/Q2 2021/22

The Cabinet Member for Environment presented, for the Committee's consideration, a report which provided sickness absence data for the cumulative period Q2 2021/22 financial year plus a summary of actions.

Amongst the issues raised on the report were the following:

- In response to a query the Committee was advised that the upward trend in Sickness Absence for FTE Days lost during Quarter 2 in regard to the Environment, Communities and Education & Children Departments reflected the challenges faced by front line staff during the pandemic;
- In regard to the downward trend in Sickness Absence for FTE Days lost during Quarter 2 in the Corporate Services and Chief Executive's Departments it was considered that agile working appeared to be a major contributing factor with staff able to achieve a better work/life balance whilst still maintaining overall business delivery. The increase in agile working had also seen a decline in short term absence due to mild illnesses etc. with staff continuing to work from home when they might otherwise have stayed away from their workplace.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the report be received.

12. EXPLANATION FOR NON-SUBMISSION OF SCRUTINY REPORT

The Committee received the Non-Submission report.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the report be noted.

13. FORTHCOMING ITEMS

The Committee was advised that the date of the next scheduled meeting, 1st April, 2022, might have to be brought forward.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the list of forthcoming items to be considered at the next scheduled meeting be received.

14. MINUTES - 14TH JANUARY 2022

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on the 14th January 2022 be signed as a correct record.

CHAIR

DATE

[PLEASE NOTE: These minutes reflect the order of business itemised on the agenda for the meeting which differs from that on the webcast recording.]