

ENVIRONMENTAL & PUBLIC PROTECTION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

13 JANUARY 2020

PRESENT: Councillor J.D. James (Chair)

Councillors:

J.M. Charles, T.A.J. Davies, J.A. Davies, K. Davies, P.M. Edwards, S.J.G. Gilasbey,
T.M. Higgins, E. Morgan, B.D.J. Phillips, J.S. Phillips, A.D.T. Speake and A. Vaughan Owen.

Councillor D.E. Williams - Substitute for Councillor D. Thomas

Also in attendance:

Councillor E. Dole, Leader of the Council;
Councillor H.A.L. Evans, Executive Board Member for Environment;
Councillor P.M. Hughes, Executive Board Member for Public Protection;

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 and Environmental Services;
L. Quelch, Head of Planning;
G. Ayers, Corporate Policy and Partnership Manager;
R. James, Group Accountant;
J. Edwards, Business Improvement Manager;
J. Owen, Democratic Services Officer.

Chamber, County Hall, Carmarthen, SA31 1JP: 10:00am - 11:15am

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from Councillor D. Thomas.

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

Councillor	Minute Item(s)	Nature of Interest
S.J.G. Gilasbey	4 - Revenue Budget Strategy Consultation 2020/21 to 2022/23	She is a member of Kidwelly Industrial Museum and Trust

3. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

The Chair advised that no public questions had been received.

4. REVENUE BUDGET STRATEGY CONSULTATION 2020/21 TO 2022/23

The Committee considered the Revenue Budget Strategy 2020/21 to 2022/23 (Appendix A) which had been endorsed by the Executive Board for consultation purposes at its meeting on 6th January 2020. The report provided Members with the current view of the Revenue Budget for 2020/2021 together with indicative figures for the 2021/2022 and 2022/2023 financial years. The report was based on officers' projections of spending need and took into account the provisional settlement issued by Welsh Government on 16th December 2019.

The Head of Financial Services advised whilst the announced provisional settlement represented an increase of 4.3% as an average across Wales on the 19/20 settlement, Carmarthenshire had received an increase in WG grant of 4.4% (£11.5m) taking the Aggregate External Finance to £274.159m for 2020/21. This increase was after certain transfers into the funding for Teachers Pensions and Pay, which were only partially funded within the settlement and accounted for some £5.8m of the overall funding increase.

The Committee noted that the current projection for the Revenue Outturn for 2019/20 and that the main reasons for the Environmental Department overspends were primarily due to an increase in ALN pupil transport numbers and a shortfall in planning application income.

The report included details of the Welsh Government Service Specific Grants which were provided alongside the provisional settlement at an all Wales level. Whilst many remained at a broadly similar level, the Committee noted the all-Wales reduction of £1.8m to the Sustainable Waste Management Grant, which would reduce the support for Carmarthenshire's core waste budgets by around £110k.

In summary, the budget proposals assume the full delivery of all savings proposals, together with the identification and delivery of the shortfall in savings proposals 2021/22, and 2022/23. Further cost reductions would need to be identified and/or larger council tax increases be agreed to deliver a balanced budget for the latter two years. Furthermore, given the scale of the pressures and forecasted budget gap, Council Tax increases have been maintained at the previous MTFP levels of 4.89% in each of the three financial years which offers some mitigation to the savings proposals.

Furthermore, it was reported that due to the delay in receiving the provisional settlement, the consequential impact on Welsh Government's budget finalisation and publication had been equally delayed. Therefore, the final settlement was due to be published on 25th February, 2020 and the County Council would set the final budget on 3rd March, 2020.

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 Protections Services;
- **Appendix A(ii)** – Growth Pressures summary for 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.

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

- Reference was made to Appendix A(ii)-Growth Pressures. It was asked if the annual £230k spend on food waste bin liners was a necessary cost? The Head of Waste and Environmental Services explained, a recent analysis of the content of black bags observed that 25.8% of the black bag content in Carmarthenshire was made up of food waste and prior to the introduction of the liners it was observed from the monitoring of kerbside collection, that household food waste recycling participation did not exceed 50%.

Furthermore, feedback from a Household Waste and Recycling Service Consultation had identified that of the respondents who said that they did not partake in recycling their food waste, 64% said that they would be more likely to do so, if they were provided with free liners. Therefore, in order to support the transition of food waste from black bags into the food waste recycling scheme, food waste liners were introduced to all householders in Carmarthenshire in October 2019.

In terms of treatment costs, an increase in food waste would result in an approximate decrease in the overall annual treatment spend, whilst enabling the Authority with the ability to meet statutory targets thus avoiding the risk of a fine.

It was therefore reported, that the annual cost of the liners was necessary as it outweighed the costs associated with the method of extracting food waste placed in black bags and the financial impact on the operational vehicles, improving the efficiency of the collection and reducing vehicle breakdowns attributed to the collection of loose food.

Members reported that since the introduction of food waste bin liners, positive feed-back had been received from residents particularly in relation to hygiene and in deterring vermin.

- With reference to Appendix C - Charging Digest, concern was expressed that the income generated from providing MOT testing to the general public at a rate lower than the maximum rate set by the DVSA (Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency) was providing an unfair platform for the local private sector. It was asked, if the Authority had considered the impact of this on its competitors?

The Head of Transportation and Highways explained that whilst the maximum possible charge for Class 4 was £54.85 as set by DVSA, the price set by the Authority was deemed to be competitive for the local market with competitors also decreasing their prices. Furthermore, the Authority did not carry out any repairs on vehicles, only providing an independent MOT testing service, ensuring an objective test with unbiased results.

In response to a further query, the Head of Transportation and Highways stated that maintenance on hire/lease vehicles was charged on an hourly basis and only carried out as part of the suppliers hire/lease contract arrangements.

- Concern was expressed regarding the draft proposal to close the Household Waste Recycling Centre (HWRC) in Whitland. It was commented that the recycling centre was a much needed provision in the area with the next closest located in Nantycaws, Carmarthen. The Head of Waste and Environmental Services explained that the closure of the HWRC facility proposal was purely a financial consideration on the basis that the Whitland facility was the smallest out of the four HWRC facilities in Carmarthenshire which made the least contribution to the Councils overall waste recycling targets. The proposal was not related to the performance of the facility. It was also reported that the closure would also achieve a saving of £80k from year 2 in 2021/22.

In response to a further comment in relation to the performance targets, the Head of Waste and Environmental Services acknowledged that whilst the HWRC at Whitland had been meeting its recycling targets, it only served 7% of the County thus making the least contribution to the Councils waste recycling targets. It was emphasised that a full consultation on this proposal would be undertaken in due course.

- Reference was made to School Crossing Patrols. Whilst it was noted in the comment that 'the school crossing patrols section has reviewed all patrols to identify where there is no requirement to provide them according to the National Safety criteria', it was asked if any surveys had been undertaken in relation to the proposal to not fill future vacancies that arise in the sites that do not require school crossing patrols? Concern was expressed that School crossing patrols were an area of safety for all ages and residents.

The Head of Transportation and Highways explained that School Crossing Patrols were provided where the National Safety Criteria required them, and that the Council funded around 50% of crossings located at other locations where the criteria had not indicated a Patrol was required. The draft proposal was to retain the Patrols where they were required but phase out patrols where there was no requirement according to the criteria. Members were assured that each site would be subject to its own review.

- The Head of Transportation and Highways, in response to a request for an update on the Road Safety Manager vacancy, stated that a Road Safety Manager was currently being recruited. Furthermore, a temporary vacancy had arisen within the Road Safety Unit which had also been advertised.
- A query was raised regarding the different pricing structure for car parks throughout the County, the Head of Transportation and Highways explained that the car parking charges applied were banded primarily on the level of activity and social demographics of the surrounding area.

RESOLVED that:

4.1 The 2019/20 – 2021/22 Revenue Budget Strategy Consultation be received;

4.2 The Charging Digest for the Environment and Public Protection Services, as detailed in Appendix C to the report be endorsed.

5. REVENUE AND CAPITAL BUDGET MONITORING REPORT 2019/20

The Committee received for consideration the budget monitoring reports for the Environment Service, Public Protection Service and the Community Safety Service as at 31st October 2019 in respect of the 2019/20 financial year.

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

- In response to a query raised in relation to the monitoring update provided for waste services within Appendix C, the Head of Waste and Environmental Services explained that in order to assist in addressing the budget position, a report containing the preliminary high-level outcomes/options of the Waste Collections Service Review would be presented to Committee members for consideration in due course, but this unlikely to be before April 2020.
- Reference was made to the progress update which stated that the green waste collection service was not yet self-financing. A further update was requested. The Head of Waste and Environmental Services echoed the comment provided within the report in that the service was not anticipated to break-even this financial year, as per the original business plan. Currently, the service had circa 4,500 customers, however it was hoped that further marketing would increase customer levels facilitating towards the service to break-even in future years.
- It was commented that as the report provided was up to October 2019 a verbal update was requested with regard to Appendix F, managerial and policy savings 'off target'. The Director of Environment provided reassurance to Committee Members that the department was actively managing and continuously addressing the issues that were off target.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the report be received.

6. ENVIRONMENT DEPARTMENTAL BUSINESS PLAN 2020-23

The Committee considered the Draft Environmental Departmental Business Plan 2020 - 2023 which outlined the priorities for the department and identified how the department supported the five ways of working and the goals of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. The report included extracts of the aspects relevant to the Environmental and Public Scrutiny Committee including the following elements:-

- Highways and Transport
- Waste and Environmental Services
- Business Improvement

The following issues were discussed during consideration of the plan:

- It was suggested that it would be beneficial to include the Environment Departmental structure within the plan in order to provide Councillors with a visual representation of departmental roles. The Director of Environment agreed, however urged Members to continue to utilise the Democratic Services Unit recording system to ensure that all requests/complaints are recorded, managed and monitored appropriately.
- In relation to target completion dates on key actions and measures, it was queried what happens in cases where it had been necessary to change the completion dates. The Principal Business and Development Officer explained that all key actions, measures and progress were recorded on the internal Performance and Information Management System (PIMS) and it was rare for target dates to be changed. However, should any target dates significantly change in future, the Committee would be notified accordingly.

RESOLVED that the Environment Departmental Business Plan 2020-2023 be received.

7. COMMUNITIES DEPARTMENTAL BUSINESS PLAN 2020-23

The Committee received the Communities Departmental Business Plan 2020 - 2023 which provided Members with comprehensive overview of the Communities Departmental progress. It was noted that whilst the plan enveloped the whole of the Departments' priorities, the Committee's role was to scrutinise the Public Protection elements set out on 29 of the plan.

RESOLVED that the Communities Departmental Business Plan 2020-2023 be received.

8. CHIEF EXECUTIVES DEPARTMENTAL BUSINESS PLAN 2020-23

The Committee considered the Report on the Chief Executive's Departmental Business Plan 2020 - 2023. The report contained extracts of the aspects relevant to the Environment and Public Protection Scrutiny Committee in relation to Community Safety.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the Chief Executives Departmental Business Plan 2020-2023 be received.

9. FORTHCOMING ITEMS

The Committee received the forthcoming items for the next meeting scheduled to take place on 21st February 2020.

In order to manage the Scrutiny Committee's workload over the remaining few months of this municipal year, following discussions with the Chair, the Committee received an updated Forward Work Programme for consideration.

The Committee received the Executive Board's Forward Work Programme up to October for consideration. In response to an observation raised in relation to the absence of reports within the Environment section, the Director of Environment stated that this was due to departmental administrative error and would ensure that it would be rectified.

The Head of Homes and Safer Communities informed the Committee that the department had focussed on integrating the Environmental Protection Service Delivery actions into the Divisional Plan which had eliminated the need to develop a separate Environmental Protection Service Delivery Plan.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that

9.1 the list of forthcoming items for the meeting of the Committee to be held on the 21st February, 2020 be agreed;

9.2 the revised E&PP Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme be noted.

10. TO SIGN AS A CORRECT RECORD THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COMMITTEE HELD ON THE 15TH NOVEMBER 2019

It was raised that the minutes had omitted Councillor D. Phillips' apologies and that Councillor M.J.A. Lewis had attended in his place.

RESOLVED that the, subject to the above amendments being made, the minutes of the Environment and Public Protection Scrutiny Committee held on the 15th November, 2019 be signed as a correct record.

CHAIR

DATE