

ENVIRONMENTAL & PUBLIC PROTECTION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

1 FEBRUARY 2022

PRESENT: Councillor J.D. James (Chair)

Councillors:

J.M. Charles, T.A.J. Davies, J.A. Davies, K. Davies, S.J.G. Gilasbey, T.M. Higgins, E. Morgan, B.D.J. Phillips, J.S. Phillips, D. Thomas, A. Vaughan Owen and A.D.T. Speake. K. Madge - substitute for Councillor P.M. Edwards).

Also in attendance:

Councillor C.A. Davies, Cabinet Member for Communities and Rural Affairs;
Councillor H.A.L. Evans, Cabinet Member for Environment;
Councillor P.M. Hughes, Cabinet Member for Public Protection;
Councillor D.M. Jenkins, Cabinet Member for Resources.

The following Officers were in attendance:

N. Daniel, Head of ICT and Corporate Policy; Interim Head of Planning
A. Williams, Head of Waste and Environmental Services;
R. Hemingway, Head of Financial Services;
R. Griffiths, Head of Place and Sustainability;
J. Morgan, Head of Homes & Safer Communities;
S. Pilliner, Head of Transportation & Highways;
D.W. John, Environmental Services Manager;
R. James, Group Accountant;
M. Roberts, Policy and Strategy Officer, Environmental and Enforcement;
K. Evans, Assistant Democratic Services Officer;
S. Rees, Simultaneous Translator;
R. Morris, Members Support Officer;
J. Owen, Democratic Services Officer.

Virtual Meeting - 10.00 am - 12.00 pm

[Note: The Chair, after having received a request from Councillor Philip Hughes, Cabinet Member for Public Protection, agreed to change the order business on the agenda. Item 6, was taken prior to Item 4. However, for ease of referencing, these minutes reflect the order of business itemised on the agenda for the meeting.]

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND OTHER MATTERS.

An apology for absence was received from Councillor P. M. Edwards.

The Chair formally welcomed to the meeting, Mr Rhodri Griffiths, Head of Place and Sustainability.

The Chair, on behalf of the Committee expressed condolences to the family of the late Councillor Mair Stephens.

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

Councillor	Minute No (s)	Nature of Interest
D. Phillips	Minute 4 – Revenue Budget Strategy Consultation 2022/23 to 2024/25 (Appendix C – Charging Digest)	His brother is a Licensed Dog Breeder

There were no declarations of any prohibited party whips.

3. PUBLIC QUESTIONS (NONE RECEIVED)

The Chair advised that no public questions had been received.

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

[NOTE: Councillor D. Phillips declared an interest in Appendix ‘C’ to the report (Charging Digest) did not speak or vote on that Appendix].

The Committee considered the report presented by the Cabinet Member for Resources on the Council’s Revenue Budget Strategy 2022/23 to 2024/25, as endorsed by the Cabinet for consultation purposes at its meeting held on the 17th January 2022. The report 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 based on officers’ projections of spending requirements and taken account of the provisional settlement issued by Welsh Government on the 21st December 2021. 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.

The Cabinet Member advised that the provisional settlement from Welsh Government this year was considerably higher than what was planned for, however he also highlighted that the scale of expenditure pressures that this Authority and other Local Authorities were facing was also at an unprecedented high level, which offset the higher settlement. The provisional settlement represented an average increase of 9.4% across Wales on the 2021/22 settlement. Carmarthenshire’s settlement figures saw an increase of 9.2% (£26.335m) thereby taking the Aggregate External Finance to £311.957m for 2022/23 which included £302k in respect of the Social Care Workforce Grant.

Across the whole of the council’s budgets, validation added £23m, by some margin the highest we have needed to allow for in recent years.

The budget also included £12.5m. for new departmental expenditure pressures which have been identified by departments and were inescapable if we are to continue to deliver our main services at the current level. As with the inflationary uplift, this was considerably more than the norm and reflected the scale of pressures on the current Council’s services.

In respect of the savings proposals (Appendix Aii), the Cabinet Member explained that the continued response to the pandemic had further impacted on the delivery of efficiencies.

Nevertheless, it was highlighted that the Councils budget strategy had put forward some £3.8m of savings next year and a further £7.9m over the following 2 years. In relation to this committee's remit, the current proposals totalled some £886k in year 1 and a further £1.6m over the following 2 years.

The Budget Strategy proposed a Council Tax of 4.39% for 2022/23, in line with the Medium-Term Financial Plan, and that proposal would be considered as part of the budget finalisation process over the next month and where the Authority received further clarification on cost and grant funding with a view to limiting the Council Tax increase as far as possible. Final budget proposals would then be presented to the Cabinet late February, to ensure a balanced budget was presented to County Council.

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 and Public Protection Services
- **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:-

- The following queries and concerns were raised in regard to car parking charges and the proposal to introduce charges to additional car parks as cited on Appendix Aii of the report:-
 - It was asked which 'additional car parks' had been identified, where were they located, what the process to introduce the charges would be and would Members be made aware?
 - It was asked consideration had been given to the reasons why the car parks were currently free to use?
 - A concern was raised in regard to the overall increase of car parking charges and the potential impact on the smaller towns and businesses therein.

The Head of Highway and Transportation, in response stated that the proposal to introduce charges to additional car parks would involve the following car parks which were currently free to use:-

- Dafen Steele, Llanelli
- Llanybydder
- Station Car Park and Sea View Terrace, Burry Port
- Glan-yr-Afon and Station Road Car Parks, Kidwelly
- Llansteffan
- Eva Terrace, Ferryside

In terms of the due process, it was explained that subject to the approval of the budget strategy, to enable the charges to be applied a lengthy statutory process for the creation of a Traffic Regulation Order would take place. As part of this process the proposed Traffic Regulation Order which would be subject to a formal stakeholder consultation and public notices.

The Head of Highway and Transportation confirmed that the reasons behind the current use of free car parks had been explored and was factored into the current proposal.

In relation to the general increase in car park charges, the Head of Waste and Environmental Services highlighted that as stated in the report, the increase was planned for April 2020 but was put into effect in January 2021 and that there was no proposal within this budget strategy to further increase the charges.

Contrary to the concerns regarding the increase in car park charges, a comment was raised that whilst any increase in charges was controversial in its nature, it was highlighted that there were also many members of the public who do not own vehicles, of which would not be affected by the increase in charges but would be affected by any increase in Council Tax.

It was raised that the carpark charges within the town of Carmarthen were substantially higher than those within Ammanford and Llanelli, in the interest of fairness, it was asked if a review of the carpark charges across Carmarthenshire could be undertaken with a view to be consistent. The Head of Waste and Environmental Services stated that the comment would be considered, however the variance in terms of the location and usage would be a factor in the different charging rate. In addition, Members were informed that the charges were an important income stream to enable necessary maintenance on the car parks to be undertaken.

Further comments were raised regarding the economic situation and footfall which differed between Ammanford, Llanelli and Carmarthen and the reason why the carpark changes within Ammanford and Llandeilo was at a lower rate due to the economic position. Concern was raised that an increase in carpark charges would have a detrimental impact on the smaller towns and its businesses.

- A concern was raised in relation to the lack of maintenance and aesthetic care of the infrastructure and fixtures within Ammanford and the need for a plan to manage this was called for. In response, the Head of Waste and Environmental Services explained that the budget strategy had included the financial position and the proposals for members consideration and unfortunately this area of maintenance was no longer available.
- In reference to Road Safety Innovation, clarification was sought how income and sponsorship would be obtained. The Head of Highways and Transportation explained that in exploring how additional income could be obtained, the team had discovered examples across the Country where road safety activities had attracted sponsorship. It was identified that there was a potential opportunity to achieve a modest income by utilising services such as school crossing patrols and training.
- Reference was made to the proposal in relation to Highways - 'subject to the financial position remaining unchanged the service will be forced to further reduce the level of general maintenance work' as stated in Appendix Aii of the report. In acknowledging that the condition of the highways was currently dependant on the continued significant investment bids, strong concern was expressed that further budget reductions would be detrimental to the road conditions within Carmarthenshire. Following the general consensus of the Committee to protect the maintenance and improve the conditions of the County's highways, it was therefore recommended to place the allocated sum of £757k within highways budget.
- Information was sought in respect of the School Crossing Patrol vacancies and the timescales. The Head of Highways and Transportation reported that the explained that whilst a continuous recruitment process for School Crossing Patrols was in effect, there had been some difficulties in filling vacancies on some sites. In the interim, the team were working with the Community to assist in the provision of school crossing.
- In response to a query raised regarding the vacant post within the Public Rights of Way section, the Head of Highways and Transportation reported that the first round of the recruitment process had been completed and would be appointing shortly.
- Reference was made to the Traffic Management section of the Charging Digest, Appendix C. It was asked if the 2% price increase in line with inflation could be further increased? The Cabinet Member for Resources explained that as stated within the report, the charging would be minimised to 2.5% in respect of the burden on household budgets. It was further commented that an increase within the Traffic Management section would not have a direct impact on households. In acknowledging that income was an important and necessary stream, the comment on the percentage price increase was echoed and supported as long as it does not directly impact on households.

In addition, it was asked if inflation would be added to the charges that had not increased? The Cabinet Member for Resources stated that it would be prudent to undertake a review of all charges that does not directly impact on ratepayers.

- Reference was made to fixed penalty notices and their charges. It was commented that clean-up operations attributed to clearing up dog faeces and litter were costly and fixed penalty charges, whilst contributing towards these costs were also a form of punishment for irresponsible behaviour therefore, it was asked if the fixed penalty charges could be increased? The Head of Waste and Environmental Services explained that the Council, in setting the charges were governed by legislation and the charges seen within the digest were set towards the upper limit and that any further increase would fall outside of the legislation. A further increase to reach the absolute maximum could be achieved in the future in consultation with the relevant Cabinet Member. It was strongly expressed that a review take place on all fixed penalty notice charges and ensure that they are set to the maximum limit of the legislation as soon as practically possible.

RESOLVED subject to the Committee's comments being considered as part of the consultation that:-

4.1 the 2022/23 – 2024/25 Revenue Budget Strategy Consultation be received;

4.2 the Charging Digests for the Environmental and Public Protection, as detailed in Appendix C to the report, be endorsed.

5. REVENUE & CAPITAL BUDGET MONITORING REPORT 2021/22

The Committee considered the Revenue and Capital Budget Monitoring Report, presented the report relevant to the Environmental and Public Protection Services, which provided an update on the latest budgetary position as at 31st October 2021 in respect of the 2021/22 financial year.

It was reported that the projections reflected the re-imburements received from Welsh Government for additional Covid-19 related expenditure via the hardship fund and also to cover the loss of income from services impacted by the pandemic. The Environmental and Public Protection section was projecting an underspend of £256K on the revenue budget and net variance of £17,160K compared with a working net budget of £18,270k giving a -£1,110k.

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

- In response to a query raised in relation to the Green Waste Collection, the Environmental Services Manager clarified that the surplus was due to the increased customer base and confirmed that that the service was on track and had achieved its planned breakeven position.

- The Environmental Services Manager in response to a query raised on the charges for public conveniences reported that the planned increase had not been put into effect due to the pandemic.

RESOLVED that the report be received.

6. LOCAL ENVIRONMENT QUALITY MANAGEMENT PLAN 2022 - 2026

The Committee considered a report on the Local Environment Quality Management Plan 2022-2026, presented by the Cabinet Member for Environment and the Cabinet Member for Public Protection.

The plan included the direction of the Council's litter management within the County for the next four years and aimed to demonstrate how litter management would be undertaken, whilst contributing to the Council's Corporate Strategy, with particular emphasis Wellbeing Objective 10 – Healthy and Safe Environment; look after the environment now and in the future.

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

- In response to a query raised regarding the number of officers were available within enforcement, the Head of Waste and Environmental Services reported that there were currently 8 officers with 1 vacancy, therefore a total of 9 staff within the enforcement team.
- Reference was made to section 11.2 – Voluntary Groups and Other Organisations. More information was sought regarding the publicity of information to encourage and aid members of the public and Town/Community Councils to engage in setting up groups to clean villages and rural areas. The Cabinet Member for Environment highlighted that this would be relevant to the Pride in your Patch initiative will be re-instated. The Environmental Services Manager further explained to members that the 'Pride in your Patch' initiative works to engage local communities seek volunteers to become litter champions who would then arrange local litter picks. The Policy and Strategy Officer, Environmental and Enforcement reported that there were currently 52 groups registered across Carmarthenshire and that he was currently working closely with the risk assessment team regarding appropriate insurance cover for volunteers. Other initiatives were effective which included Caru Cymru project and Keep Britain Tidy.
- The Policy and Strategy Officer, Environmental and Enforcement in response to a query in relation to the disposal of adhoc litter picking stated that an online Googleform had been introduced which enables members of the public to notify the Authority of the litter pick event/activity which will also collect the data in relation to where the bags of litter would be located and arrangements would be made to collect them.

- Furthermore, in response to a query raised in accessing the red bags specifically for litter pickers, the Policy and Strategy Officer, Environmental and Enforcement explained that Keep Britain Tidy issue the red bags to registered Keep Wales Tidy Champions. In addition, the clear bags were issued to the Authority's Local Environment Quality Champions, an initiative which was developed over the pandemic.
- Reference was made to the ongoing issue of dog fouling. It was asked if any progress had been made with discussions with the Police Constable in regard to the receipt of a fine being shared between the Council and PCSO officers. The Head of Waste and Environmental Services explained that work had been undertaken with the police by way of a letter to the Chief Constable and training and provided fixed penalty stationary to the police. It was reported that whilst the police were supportive, they depended on the availability of resources and their priorities particularly throughout the pandemic. This matter would be re-visited going forward.
- It was strongly expressed that offenders of dog fouling and littering should be 'named and shamed' in the local newspapers and on social media and asked how proactive the Council was on this matter? The Cabinet Member for Public Protection assured members that work was currently being carried out to increase the number of fixed penalty notices within the paper acknowledging that there was a cost element to this.
- A concern was raised regarding dog fouling in parks and the dangers of toxocariasis, an infection that can be contracted by animal faeces if handled. In addition, it was expressed that a clear management plan on the clearance of litter is important. The Cabinet member for Public Protection reminded the Committee of the consultation on the enhanced Public Space Protection Orders with parks and sports fields being an area of consideration. In addition, the Cabinet Member strongly emphasised that members of the public also have a duty of care not to litter the countryside and take their litter home. The Head of Waste and Environmental Services add that behavioural change would be the best solution, and that the members of the litter team were present within town centres daily, however rural areas relied on volunteers due to limited resources.
- It was asked if it was possible to provide Town and Community Councils and volunteer groups with litter picking equipment? The Policy and Strategy Officer, Environmental and Enforcement explained that there was a litter picking hub in Carmarthen Town where equipment and bags could be accessed. In addition, the approach of enabling Community Councils to obtain equipment permanently this could be considered as part of a review of the 'Pride in your Patch' initiative. Alternatively, another option to gain access to equipment would be through Keep Wales Tidy who would communicate with persons keen on setting up additional litter picking hubs in their area.

- Information was sought in relation to the legal position of utilising CCTV within Town and Community Councils to catch offenders? The Policy and Strategy Officer, Environmental and Enforcement explained that the use of CCTV must be approached with caution and that there was negativity surrounding the provision of CCTV for the use of dog fouling activities. Historically, robust intelligence was usually obtained by responsible dog owners, which the officers respond to appropriately. The Head of Waste and Environmental Services advised that Town and Community Councils utilising CCTV to do so with due diligence.
- Reference was made to the LEQ Action Plan. In noting the operation to 'Develop and the robust strategy and action plan to tackle fly-tipping (1) and (2), it was raised that the Committee would be carrying out a Task and Finish Review on Fly-tipping and asked how this would be approached? The Environmental Services Manager stated that the involvement of the Task and Finish Group as part of the review would be key in the development of the strategy.

RESOLVED TO RECOMMEND TO CABINET that the Local Environment Quality Management Plan 2022-2026 be approved.

7. FORTHCOMING ITEMS

The Committee considered the list of forthcoming items to be placed on the agenda for the next meeting scheduled to take place on 7th March 2022 and was afforded the opportunity to request for any specific information that Members may wish to include within the reports.

The Chair informed the Committee that he had received a request to include a report on the Household Waste and Recycling Centre (HWRC) report onto the next meetings agenda. The Chair proposed to accept the request as the report seeks to provide a future strategy of accessibility for the HWRC service in Carmarthenshire, this was duly seconded.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that:

- 7.1 the list of forthcoming items to be considered at the next scheduled meeting on the 7th March 2022 be noted;**
- 7.2 the HWRC report be included on the next meeting's agenda – 7th March 2022.**
- 7.3 the Committee's revised Forward Work Programme 2021/22 be noted.**

8. TO SIGN AS A CORRECT RECORD THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COMMITTEE HELD ON THE 22 DECEMBER 2021

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on the 22nd December, 2021 be signed as a correct record.

CHAIR

DATE