

PLACE, SUSTAINABILITY & CLIMATE CHANGE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

23 JANUARY 2023

PRESENT: Councillor J.D. James (Chair)

Councillors (In Person):

T.A.J. Davies; K. Davies; B.D.J. Phillips; G.B. Thomas.

Councillors (Virtually):

S.M. Allen; T.M. Higgins; N. Lewis;
Councillor W.T. Evans - Substitute for Councillor C. Evans;
Councillor D. Cundy - Substitute for Councillor Shelly Godfrey-Coles;
Councillor M. Donoghue - Substitute for Councillor G. Jones.

Also in attendance (In Person):

Councillor A. Lenny, Cabinet Member for Resources;
Councillor A. Vaughan Owen, Cabinet Member for Climate Change, Decarbonisation and Sustainability;
Councillor E. Thomas, Cabinet Member for Transport, Waste and Infrastructure Services.

Also Present (In Person):

A. Williams, Director of Place and Infrastructure;
J. Morgan, Head of Homes & Safer Communities;
S. Pilliner, Head of Transportation & Highways;
J. Edwards, Business Improvement Manager;
R. Hemingway, Head of Financial Services;
D.W. John, Interim Head of Waste and Environmental Services;
R. S. Waters, Highways and Transportation Services Manager;
R. James, Group Accountant;
A. Eynon, Principal Translator;
J. Owen, Democratic Services Officer [Minute Taker].

Also Present (Virtually):

R. Griffiths, Head of Place and Sustainability;
M.S. Davies, Democratic Services Officer.

Chamber, County Hall, Carmarthen. SA31 1JP and remotely – 2:00pm - 4:00pm

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors S. Godfrey-Coles, C. Evans, G. Jones and P. Cooper.

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

There were no declarations of any prohibited party whips.

Councillor	Minute Item(s)	Nature of Interest
A. Davies	5 - Revenue Budget Strategy Consultation 2023/24 to 2025/26	Public rights of way crosses land he owns.
D. Phillips	5 - Revenue Budget Strategy Consultation 2023/24 to 2025/26	Public rights of way crosses land he owns.
G. Thomas	5 - Revenue Budget Strategy Consultation 2023/24 to 2025/26	Public rights of way crosses land he owns.

3. PUBLIC QUESTIONS (NONE RECEIVED)

The Chair advised that no public questions had been received.

4. EXPLANATION FOR NON-SUBMISSION OF SCRUTINY REPORT

The Committee received an explanation for the non-submission of the Departmental Business Plans.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that:

- 4.1 the revised date for the Departmental Business Plans be accepted;**
- 4.2 the explanation for the non-submission be noted.**

5. REVENUE BUDGET STRATEGY CONSULTATION 2023/24 to 2025/26

[Note: Councillors A. Davies, D. Phillips and G. Thomas declared a personal interest in this item. They remained in the meeting, took part in the deliberations and voting thereof.]

The Committee considered a report on the Council's Revenue Budget Strategy 2023/24 to 2025/26, as endorsed by the Cabinet for consultation purposes at its meeting held on the 9th January 2023. The report provided Members with the current view of the Revenue Budget for 2023/2024 together with indicative figures for the 2024/2025 and 2025/2026 financial years based on officers' projections of spending requirements and took account of the provisional settlement issued by Welsh Government on the 14th December 2022.

The Committee was informed that the announced provisional settlement represented an average increase of 8.0% across Wales on the 2022/23 settlement, with Carmarthenshire's increase being 8.5% (£26.432mm) thereby taking the Aggregate External Finance to £338.017m for 2023/24. While the settlement was significantly above the initial indicative figure of a 3.4% increase and provided some £15.5m more than the Council's original assumption, the Welsh Government had recognised the increased figure would still not be sufficient to meet inflationary pressures facing councils, pay awards and fuel price increases and difficult decisions would need to be made.

Whilst the budget proposals assumed the full delivery of all savings proposals, it was noted further work would be required to develop the cost reductions for the 2024/25 and 2025/26 financial years to be able to maintain the current Budget Strategy and level of Council tax.

It was noted that given the current risks around the Budget Strategy and the ongoing inflationary backdrop, together with other budgetary pressures, the proposed Council Tax increase for 2023/24 had been set at 7% to mitigate reductions to critical services. In years 2 and 3, the financial picture remained uncertain and, as such, modelled indicative Council Tax rises of 4% and 3% had been made purely for planning purposes and sought to strike a balance with budget reductions. Those proposals would be considered by the Council in setting the Council Tax level for 2023/24 at its meeting on the 1st March 2023. Additionally, as the Welsh Government final settlement figure was not due to be announced until the 7th March, 2023 any amendments required to be considered to the budget strategy as a result of that announcement would need to be considered by 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 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.

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

Queries raised on the Appendix Ai (Savings Proposals):

- Reference was made to Traffic Management and the implementation of road safety/speed management schemes. In respect of the efficiency description 'Three-year moratorium on new speed limits not included within 20mph legislation unless overriding safety issue' it was commented that three years was a long time and it was asked if it could be dealt with in conjunction with the roll out of the new 20mph legislation? The Head of Highways and Transportation stated that the change to the default speed limit from 30mph to 20mph which affected all residential areas was a comprehensive piece of work involving a lot of resources. It was reported that the moratorium was realistic in terms of the extensive work required.
- In response to a query raised on the efficiency description - Road Safety Innovation within Traffic Management, the Head of Highways and Transportation explained that a report on Roundabout Sponsorship would be available shortly. The highways team had been working to find ways and approaches to increase revenue particularly following the pandemic and sponsorship was an approach that would provide much needed income.

- In reference to the School Transport and the efficiency description regarding Additional Needs Personal Travel Budgets, clarification was sought in respect of the payment process. The Head of Highways and Transportation explained that currently pupils with additional learning needs were provided with an option of accessing specialist transportation. In cases where parents have specialist mobility vehicles, a personal travel budget was offered which would be subject to a claim being made by the parent.

In response to a further query, the Head of Highways and Transportation explained that a formal policy would include rigorous validation process ensuring that reimbursements were legitimate and made to the correct person.

- In reference to the Bring Sites, it was asked if there would be a future strategy and if the communities would still be able to use them. The Interim Head of Waste and Environmental Services explained that currently there were a number of bring sites offering glass, textiles and electric recycling which would be retained in the long term. However, the bring sites that offered just glass collections would be mapped against the current demand and the recently launched glass collection service. The results of the analysis would inform the rationalisation of the bring sites over the next 12 months with a view of up to 50% being removed by 2024.

In addition, the Cabinet Member for Resources emphasised to Members that in view of the fact that the Council was liable of a fine of £160k for every 1% below the Welsh Government statutory target that is not met, it was important the public be made aware of the importance of recycling from not only the benefits to the environment but from a financial perspective.

- Reference was made to Property Maintenance. In terms of the energy efficiency measures, it was raised that a neighbouring Authority were seeking to make a reduction in the temperature of offices to 19 degrees in order to save £26k. Considering this, it was asked if this Authority was looking at a similar efficiency? The Cabinet Member for Climate Change, Decarbonisation and Sustainability stated that Powys County Council similar to Carmarthenshire County Council were committed to reach Net Zero by 2030. Members were reminded that as stated in the Net Zero Plan, presented earlier this year, the Authority to date made a 34% carbon reduction, however on closer analysis it was apparent that the electricity had reduced by 21% and gas (heating) had only reduced by 11%. He added that whilst significant effort had taken place to reduce carbon, one of the challenges was that this Authority, like many Authorities had many old buildings which were difficult to zone. Data, in terms of energy use would continue to be collected in order to inform where interventions would be needed.
- Reference was made to Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRC). It was suggested that the Authority should be considering alternative options eg. cross border working or introducing a charge to utilise them. In addition, in commenting that the opening hours at HWRC's seemed to be too restrictive for the public who work 9-5 weekdays, it was suggested that the operational hours be re-considered at all the HWRC sites.

It was further commented that currently agency staff were employed at the HWRC sites and that the use permanent staff could be more cost effective. The Interim Head of Waste and Environmental Services explained that currently HWRC's offer free services to householders and residents of Carmarthenshire and that previously charges for trade/commercial waste customers were in place which presented significant issues in terms of queueing and creating undue delays for residents using the HWRC sites. In response, trade/commercial waste was diverted to the trade/commercial waste facility at Nantycaws, Carmarthen. It was highlighted, that a consultation was currently underway and that any suggestions and feedback relating to the operations and hours would be gratefully received through the consultation process. In terms of staffing implications, the Interim Head of Waste and Environmental Services stated that he would seek further clarification from Cwm Environmental Ltd.

- Reference was made to Parking Services. In respect of the efficiency description to introduce charging at 9 car parks, which currently were free to park, it was suggested that each car park should be looked at on a case-by-case basis. It was felt that by introducing a charge on the free car park would have a detrimental impact upon and undermine the viability of nearby businesses. In raising concern, it was asked if the income would be more than the cost of implementing a charge and if any research or survey's done to back up the proposal? The Head of Highways and Transportation explained that all car parking charges will be consistent with comparable parking tariffs within the County. It was highlighted that whilst there would be a short-term capital investment to introduce the car parking changes there would be a long-term revenue gain.

It was formally proposed that in regard to the proposal for the introduction of parking charges at the 9 car parks, as stated in the report, be reviewed by the Cabinet Member on a case-by-case basis. This was duly seconded.

- In response to a concern raised regarding the proposal to rationalise up to 20% of litter bins, the Interim Head of Waste and Environmental Services stated that the rationalisation would be in the main include litter bins located on laybys along the trunk road network and non-amenity areas. Research suggested that where litter bins have been removed the litter in that area had improved. Bins in high footfall areas would remain in situ. The rationalisation would be a managed process.

It was asked, prior to the removal of a litter bin, if the appropriate ward members could be consulted upon? The Interim Head of Waste and Environmental Services stated that a list would be provided to ward members. Comments were made in agreement that bins often attract rubbish and acknowledged the need to rationalise and strategically place rubbish bins.

Queries raised on the Appendix C (Charging Digest):

- Reference was made to the proposal to increase in the Residents Parking Permit Admin Charge. It was observed that the proposal stated that it was being increased by 10% however, that proposed cost increase in the report was from £30 to £40 which was more than the 10%. It was suggested to increase the charge to £50, which would equate to less than £1 per week for residents. The Cabinet Member for Resources stated that the rationale behind the £10 increase was that an increase had not been made since 2009.
- Reference was made to the Fixed Penalty Notices (FPN). The Cabinet Member for Climate Change, Decarbonisation and Sustainability explained that the charges were outlined in Appendix C for Members however, offered the Scrutiny Committee additional time should they wish for the Task and Finish Group undertaking the review on the management of fly-tipping in Carmarthenshire to consider the charge of the FPN prior to agreement. The Chair in thanking the Cabinet Member, stated that the Task and Finish Group would ensure that the charge in respect of the fly-tipping FPN would be considered as part of the review.
- In response to a query raised in regard to the Buy with Confidence Scheme, the Head of Homes and Safer Communities in offering to circulate the exact membership numbers to the scheme to Members following the meeting, confirmed that the scheme was being actively promoted.
- In view of the budget, a general question was raised regarding the Net Zero targets. The Cabinet Member for Climate Change, Decarbonisation and Sustainability
- In response to a general query raised in regard to the budget impact and the Net Zero targets, the Cabinet Member for Climate Change, Decarbonisation and Sustainability stated that budget constraints would naturally challenge the ambition to reach Net Zero carbon by 2030, however a toolkit had been introduced which enabled different scenarios to be modelled informing the best approach in how to reach the target of being Net Zero by 2030 in the most effective and efficient way.

RESOLVED that:-

- 5.1 the 2023/24 to 2025/26 Revenue Budget Strategy be received;**
- 5.2 the proposals for delivery of efficiency savings as identified in Appendix A(i) be received;**
- 5.3 the Charging Digest for the Environment and Public Protection Services, as detailed in Appendix C to the report, be endorsed;**
- 5.4 the proposal for the introduction of parking charges at the 9 carparks as stated in the report be reviewed by the Cabinet Member on a case-by-case basis.**

6. HIGHWAY ASSET MANAGEMENT PLAN - MAINTENANCE MANUAL PARTS 4.5, 4.6 & 4.7

The Committee received the Highway Asset Management Plan (HAMP) Maintenance Manual in support of the Highway Asset Management Plan presented by Cabinet Member for Transport, Waste and Infrastructure Services. The report asked that the Committee consider and comment on the following parts attached to the report prior to adoption by the Cabinet.

Part 4.5 - Highway Drainage Management

Part 4.6 - Geotechnical Management

Part 4.7 - Highway Emergency Response

The following comments/queries were raised on the report:-

- In respect of gullies and drainage, concern was raised that gullies on single track roads had been gradually filled in to avoid cars falling in and in doing so has removed an essential outlet for water contributing to flooding. In addition, it was understood that that NRW like to place branches into gullies in an attempt to slow the flow of water. In respect of the comments, it was asked how these were managed?
The Highways and Transportation Services Manager explained that most gullies along the highway network have a sump system. It is the sump system which needs to be clear in order to manage the water flow.
- In response to a query regarding adjacent landowners responsibilities, the Highways and Transportation Services Manager explained that in terms of the discharge from the highway drainage system onto adjacent land the highway authority would normally have prescriptive right of discharge on to land. However, in the case of water being discharged from adjacent land onto the highway, it was highlighted this was a more complex matter and each case would need to be considered.
- In regard to the joint responsibility of the NRW and the Council to keep waterways clear, it was asked how this was managed? The Head of Highways and Transportation explained that it is complex but in simple terms, NRW were responsible for main rivers and water courses and the Council had responsibility for smaller streams and trash screens. In the event of adverse weather alerts, relevant trash screen checks would be made to ensure there were no interruptions to the flow of water.
- Reference was made to drainage pipes cited in section 4.5.2 Drainage Asset Information. It was asked who was responsible for the pipes underground highway drainage system pipes? The Head of Highways and Transportation stated that one of the common issues is tree root ingress into pipes which can be resource intensive to rectify. Typically, the responsibility for the offending tree would lie with adjacent landowner meaning a straightforward case, however in the majority of cases the Council would have to accept some liability.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the Highway Asset Management Plan - Maintenance Manual Parts 4.5, 4.6 & 4.7 be received.

7. WELSH GOVERNMENT 20MPH SPEED LIMIT LEGISLATION

The Committee received a report on the Welsh Government 20mph Speed Limit Legislation, presented by the Cabinet Member for Transport, Waste and Infrastructure Services which provided an update on legislative change being introduced by Welsh Government in September 2023. The legislation would reduce the current 30mph default speed limit on restricted (street lit) roads in residential areas to 20mph.

The following comments/queries were raised on the report:-

- Reference was made to the Welsh Government grant funding of £797,074 which was available in 2022/23 and that further bid submissions would be made for following years and that it was anticipated that this would be in the order of £2.16M in 2023/24. Officers were asked, how optimistic were they in obtaining the grant funding? And if not, would it be utilised from the budget? The Head of Highways and Transportation explained that with the Welsh Government being fully committed to fund the implementation of the 20mph legislation together with positive communications it was confident that the bid would be met.
- Concerns were raised in relation to:
 - the heavy resource that would be committed to implement the change in speed limit and;
 - the enforcement required to improve safety. It was asked if it was possible for this Committee or Council could write to the Welsh Government to ask for funding for additional enforcement officers;
 - In respect of all 30mph roads in residential areas being reduced to 20mph it was asked if this could be retrospectively changed, if so how?

In response, the Highways and Transportation Services Manager stated that a project had been set up to deliver this initiative where it was agreed to retain the work in house rather than outsourcing it to consultations. The benefits were that officers had a sound working knowledge of speed limits, traffic regulation orders and local knowledge which would better serve the project and the communities. Furthermore, officers time was being funded through the grant. In acknowledging that the team was small with a limited time resource, to help manage this, included as part of the budget proposals was a moratorium on Traffic Regulation Orders whilst this legislation is being delivered. However, reassurance was given that should safety be of significant concern the case would be considered accordingly.

In terms of enforcement, the Highways and Transportation Services Manager explained that whilst enforcement could only be achieved through the police and Go Safe Partnership, as part of the initiative a resource pack would be made available for communities which would enable them to set up community speed watch initiatives. Communities would be able to monitor actual speeds as opposed to perceived speeds and develop surveys to understand levels of non-compliance. The intelligence gathered could be provided to the police for them to act on as appropriate. This resource pack had been included in the bid submission.

The Highways and Transportation Services Manager recognised that when the legislation is in force in September 2023, there would likely to be some legacy issues in terms of community views and in some cases there may be a need to review speed limits. Should there be a case to change a speed limit this could take place through the Traffic Regulation Order process.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the report on 20MPH Speed Limit Legislation be received.

8. CARMARTHENSHIRE EQUESTRIAN STRATEGY UPDATE

The Committee received a report on the Carmarthenshire Equestrian Strategy Update, presented by the Cabinet Member for Transport, Waste and Infrastructure Services. The development of an Equestrian Strategy for Carmarthenshire was a commitment contained in the Carmarthenshire Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP) 2019-2029. Officers were in the process of developing the Equestrian Strategy and this report provided an update on progress.

The following comments/queries were raised on the report:-

- In acknowledging the vast network to manage, concern was raised that the department was underfunded, and that more investment was needed before some of the paths would be lost.
- It was commented that it would be beneficial for the final Strategy to include a bridleway map. In addition, whilst it was pleasing to note that over 500 responses had been received following the comprehensive public survey questionnaire between 21st June 2021 and 25th July 2021, it was asked if the Committee could receive a summary of the responses, to consider the views and data. The Head of Highways and Transportation agreed.
- In commenting that there were few bridlepaths left in some areas, it was asked if footpaths could be converted to bridlepaths. The Head of Highways and Transportation explained that as this was a first in terms of an Equestrian Strategy, research was necessary in order to understand the needs of the Equestrian sector further. Following the analysis of the intelligence gathered it would be necessary to consider the resources available in order to develop a realistic strategy that can be delivered upon. Until this piece of work has been completed it was not possible to determine if the level of resources was available to manage any changes to the footway/bridleways.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the Carmarthenshire Equestrian Strategy Update be received.

9. 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 24th February, 2023 and was afforded the opportunity to request for any specific information that Members may wish to include within the reports.

In addition to the reports that were to be presented at the formal Scrutiny Committee on 24th February, Members noted the reports that would also be circulated to them outside of the formal Committee process for scrutiny.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the list of forthcoming items for the Committee meeting to be held on the 24th February 2023 be agreed.

10. TO SIGN AS A CORRECT RECORD THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COMMITTEE HELD ON THE 15TH DECEMBER 2022

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on the 15th December, 2022 be signed as a correct record.

CHAIR

DATE