

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNCIL CABINET COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet meeting held on Thursday 9th February, 2017
at 10:30am at the Council Headquarters, Clydach Vale.

County Borough Councillors – Cabinet Members in attendance:-

A.Morgan (Chair), M Norris

R.Bevan M.Forey A.Crimmings G. Hopkins

J.Rosser M.Webber E.Hanagan

Other County Borough Councillors in attendance

P Jarman

E Webster

Officers in attendance

Mr C Bradshaw – Chief Executive

Mr C Jones – Director, Legal & Democratic Services

Mr C Hanagan – Director, Cabinet & Public Relations (Secretary to the Cabinet)

Mr C Lee – Group Director, Corporate & Frontline Services

Ms E Thomas – Temporary Director, Education & Lifelong Learning

Mr N Wheeler – Director, Highways & Streetcare Services

Mr B Davies – Director, Financial Services

Mr P Mee – Service Director, Public Health & Protection

Mr R Evans – Head of Human Resources

115 DECLARATION OF INTEREST

In accordance with the Council's Code of Conduct, County Borough Councillor, P Jarman declared an interest in items 3, 5 & 6 where her dispensation to speak may affect the decision making process.

116 MINUTES

The Cabinet **RESOLVED** to approve the minutes of the 18th January, 2017 as an accurate reflection of the meeting.

117 COUNCIL FEES & CHARGES POLICY 2017/18

The Group Director, Corporate & Frontline Services provided the Cabinet with a report, setting out the proposed revisions to Council fees and charges levels for the financial year 2017/18, all to be effective from 1st April 2017 or as soon as is practicable thereafter.

Members were reminded of the decision made at Council on the 26th February 2014, where the budget strategy for 2014/15 was agreed. Part of the strategy was to increase fees and charges, in total, by an average of 3% above the Retail Prices Index (RPI) per annum for 2014/15 and for each subsequent year to 2017/18.

The officer referred Cabinet Members to section 5 of the report where the review and proposed changes was outlined. It was explained that the latest RPI level, announced in January 2017 was 2.5% and if all income was included, it would mean an increase of 5.5% but in order to protect residents from such a high increase, the increases had been capped at a flat rate of 2.25%.

The officer went on to propose that a nominal charge be applied to adult users of the Pontypridd Lido. It was explained that the online booking system used in 2016 was successful but due to the lack of charge, some visitors booked slots but did not attend on the day. It was suggested that applying a nominal charge would not only contribute further income to the facility but it would also seek to address 'non attendance' by committing users to pay a small charge of £1. It was advised that based on a prudent estimate of potential adult users, additional income of £30k is projected for 2017/18 and would be built into the budget strategy proposals for the next financial year.

The Leader of the Council spoke positively on the report, commenting that the proposals outlined were affordable and would enable the Council to take a more positive settlement from the Welsh Government in its proposed 2017/18 budget strategy. The Leader referred to the Cabinet's previous decision to freeze Meals on Wheels and School Meals charges, commenting that this could only benefit the residents of RCT.

The Leader made reference to section 5.7 of the report, stating that the proposed nominal charge of £1 to adult users of the Pontypridd Lido wasn't considered substantial and therefore would not affect the amount of users or

income generated. This would add to income generated from the sponsorship deal, cafe and pool activities within the Lido.

The Deputy Leader added that it was pleasing to see that users under the age of 16 would continue to access the Lido for free.

With the agreement of the Chairman, County Borough Councillor and Leader of the Plaid Cymru Group, P Jarman spoke on this item.

Following further discussions, it was **RESOLVED**:

- a) To approve the proposed revised levels for all areas of the Council's fees and charges as set out at Appendix 1 of the report.
- b) To implement a nominal £1 per adult user charge (under 16 users remain free) for the Pontypridd Lido.
- c) To build the net budgetary impact (£525K for 2017/18) into budget strategy proposals for consideration by Cabinet and Council as appropriate.

118 THE COUNCIL'S 2017/18 REVENUE BUDGET

The Group Director, Corporate & Frontline Services provided the Cabinet with information in respect of the 2017/18 local government settlement, the outcomes of the general budget consultation exercise and feedback from the pre-scrutiny activity undertaken by the Finance and Performance Scrutiny Committee, to assist with its deliberations, prior to constructing the revenue budget strategy for the financial year ending 31st March 2018, which it will recommend to Council for approval.

Members were referred to Appendix A of the report, where it was explained that the Council's Senior Leadership Team had met on many occasions to discuss budget issues and had consolidated their thoughts on the impact of the local government settlement, which had been released by the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government, on the 21st December 2016.

Members were referred to section 2 of the report where the Council's overall financial position was outlined. The officer explained that the starting point for the Medium Term Financial Planning and Service Transformation Reserve as at the 31st March 2016 was £4.901M and that as part of the ongoing strategy, savings had been identified meaning that there is an increase in the level of transitional funding available and the latest position is that this reserve has now increased to £6.693M (additional in year savings to date of £1.792M).

Members were also reminded of their decision to increase Council Tax for 2016/17 by 2.75% and that the 2017/18 proposal was to increase the level by 2.25%, below the 2.5% modelled in initial budget cap calculations.

The officer referred Cabinet Members to section 4 of the report where the budget assumptions used in compiling the 'Base Budget' were outlined. It was explained that a number of adjustments had been identified that would impact on the estimated budget requirement for 2017/18 such as:

- The Local Government Pension Scheme
- Changes to the Council's car park charging regime, agreed by Cabinet on the 18th January 2017.
- The City Deal, agreed by Council on the 25th January, 2017
- Bridge Inspections, where an additional revenue budget allocation totalling £0.310M was agreed by Cabinet on the 24th November, 2016
- Living Wage Foundation, where the Council moved to the rate of £8.25 per hour in October, 2016.
- Fees & Charges
- Energy Costs where the financial impact of these increases had been estimated to be £0.642M for 2017/18.
- Homelessness Prevention

The Leader referred to section 6 of the report, commenting that it was pleasing to see that whilst Welsh Government hadn't made school protection a priority for 2017/18, there was a proposal for a 1.5% increase for schools included in the strategy. The Leader added that it was still vital for schools to remain efficient and make their own internal savings where possible.

The Cabinet Member for Education & Lifelong Learning praised this, adding that Education remained a key area within the Council.

The Cabinet Member for Health & Adult Social Services thanked officers for their hard work, commenting that the financial management was credible despite the pressures faced.

It was **RESOLVED:**

- a) To note that the procedures relating to revenue budget construction, the budget consultation process, and reporting to Council, are laid down in the "Budget and Policy Framework", contained within the Council's Constitution;
- b) To adopt the draft 2017/2018 revenue budget strategy, detailed in the Discussion Paper 'Appendix A', as the basis of the revenue budget strategy for the financial year ending the 31st March 2018, that it would wish to recommend to Council, subject to consideration of the results of the general budget consultation exercise and feedback from pre scrutiny by the Finance & Performance Scrutiny Committee.
- c) To agree the draft timetable for setting the 2017/2018 revenue budget, reproduced at Appendix A2.

- d) To agree that the Council continues to support the medium term financial strategy aimed at maximising ongoing efficiency in service delivery, targeted service transformation and other changes that maintain the financial integrity of the Council whilst still aiming as much as possible to protect jobs and key services.

119 PUBLIC SPACES PROTECTION ORDERS (DOG CONTROLS)

The Director, Highways & Streetcare Services and the Service Director, Public Health & Protection presented a joint report, seeking authority to consult on the proposal to make a Public Spaces Protection Order to introduce dog controls in Rhondda Cynon Taf.

The officer explained that although the majority of dog owners in the area are responsible, dog fouling still remains a significant concern for the Council with many complaints being received annually.

It was explained that dog fouling is unsightly and can cause toxocariasis in humans, meaning some of the authority's playing fields have to be checked prior to usage.

The officer went on to explain that a Public Spaces Protection Order would allow the Council to introduce a range of reasonable and proportionate restrictions on the use of publicly accessible land across the County Borough that would better control the harmful activities of irresponsible dog owners whilst allowing responsible dog owners to continue to exercise their dogs without undue restrictions.

The officer highlighted the importance of finding a balance between access to dog-free areas and areas where dogs are kept under strict control, and the need for those in charge of dogs to have access to areas where they can exercise their dogs without undue restrictions and referred Members to section 5 of the report where the proposed consultation was outlined:

It is proposed that the Council undertake a comprehensive consultation exercise with the public, relevant bodies and other interested parties on proposals to introduce a PSPO in the following areas, introducing prohibitions and requirements in relation to the control of dogs:

- a) Dog Fouling – applicable to all public places in the county borough of Rhondda Cynon Taf;
- b) Dogs on Leads – applicable to all cemeteries and play grounds owned and/or maintained by the Council;
- c) Dogs on Leads by Direction - applicable to all public places in the county borough of Rhondda Cynon Taf;
- d) Dog Exclusions - applied to all schools and marked sports pitches under local authority control.

The officer advised that if agreed, the consultation would last for four weeks instead of the suggested period of eight weeks due to the pre-election period.

The Cabinet Member for Prosperity, Well-being and Communities spoke positively on the proposals, commenting that the requirements and prohibitions contained within the report would be reasonable for any responsible dog owner.

The Cabinet Member for Environment, Leisure & Culture added that as the portfolio holder for 'sport', it was pleasing to see the proposal to ban dogs in playing fields as often, it is left to the individuals to check the playing fields for dog fouling prior to using it.

The Leader explained that discussions had been underway for some time in respect of improving the issue of dog fouling within RCT, explaining that a meeting was held in 2016 with sports clubs who would welcome the proposals.

With the agreement of the Chairman, County Borough Councillor P Jarman spoke on this item and questioned a number of aspects.

The Leader confirmed for members information that the proposals contained within the report had been worked on for a number of months. It was added that RCT was the first local authority in Wales to have introduced proposals of this extent in respect of dog fouling issues and that if agreed, it would be accompanied by a hard hitting marketing campaign to promote these efforts.

Following further discussions, it was **RESOLVED:**

- a) To undertake a 4 week public consultation exercise on the proposal to make a Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO) to introduce dog controls in Rhondda Cynon Taf as detailed in section 5 of the report, specifically:
 - The prohibition of dog fouling in all public places,
 - A requirement that dogs are kept on leads in play grounds & cemeteries owned/maintained by the Council,
 - A requirement to carry bags or other suitable means for the disposal of dog faeces,
 - A requirement allowing authorised officers to give a direction that a dog be put and kept on a lead if necessary,
 - A prohibition excluding dogs from all schools and marked sports pitches owned/maintained by the Council, and
 - Increasing the fixed penalty fine to the maximum permitted of £100
- b) To receive a further report detailing the responses to the public consultation and any recommendations for amendments to the proposed PSPO.

120 THE USE OF AGENCY WORKERS

The Head of Human Resources provided Cabinet with details of agency worker engagement across the Council.

Members were reminded of the Leader's request for further information to be provided in respect of the use of agency workers and arrangements in place to cover absences across the Local Authority. As part of the process, a thorough review of the contractual strategy was undertaken by the Corporate Procurement Unit and Human Resources. The review was carried out in accordance with principles of the Supply Chain Efficiency Project in order to produce a strategy which encouraged a positive market response and reduction in cost (both direct and indirect cost).

The officer referred Members to Section 5 of the report where details on the use of agency staff in terms of agency numbers, service area usage and cost for the last three financial years were outlined.

The Deputy Leader was pleased with the contents contained within the report, noting that Internal Audit and HMRC were satisfied. The Cabinet Member added that a pro-active approach was being undertaken to reduce the use of agency workers through flexible working opportunities, workforce management and improving sickness absence.

The Leader of the Council commented that it was useful to have a better understanding of the use of agency workers as they are a vital component to the running of the authority, especially in frontline services.

With the agreement of the Chairman, County Borough Councillor P Jarman spoke on this item.

In response to questions from County Borough Councillor P Jarman, The Leader went on to explain that the vast majority of staff left the authority on Voluntary Early Redundancy, with the Deputy Leader assuring that the Council's HR department works closely with the Trade Unions regularly to ensure fair treatment to agency workers and that staff exit interviews include questions in respect of stress and work overload.

It was **RESOLVED:**

- a) To note the information in respect of the use of agency workers within the Council.

The meeting closed at 11:20am

Cllr A Morgan

Chair