

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the meeting held at The Council Headquarters, The Pavilions, Clydach Vale on Monday 27th January, 2014, at 5.00 p.m.

Present

County Borough Councillor G R Davies – in the Chair

County Borough Councillors

J Bonetto
S Powderhill
T Williams

S Bradwick
G Smith

J Elliott
R K Turner

G Holmes
J Watts

P Howe
M Weaver

Other in Attendance:

County Borough Councillor R Bevan

Officers

Mr G Jones – Group Director, Environmental Services
Mr N Wheeler – Service Director, StreetCare
Mr P Mee – Service Director, Public Health & Protection
Mr N Brinn – Service Director, Highways, Transportation & Strategic Projects
Ms S Davies – Head of Cultural Services
Mr D Batten - Head of Leisure Parks & Countryside
Mr C Lee – Director of Finance
Mr A Wilkins – Corporate & Democratic Services Solicitor
Ms A Lewis – Food & Health & Safety Manager

39. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from County Borough Councillors (Mrs) L De Vet, L Langford, (Mrs) S Pickering, (Mrs) A Roberts and (Mrs) M Tegg.

40. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

In accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct the following declarations of personal interest pertaining to the agenda were made:-
County Borough Councillor J Watts - Agenda Item 6 – “My daughter carries a ‘score on the door’”

41. MINUTES

RESOLVED to approve the minutes of the Environmental Services Scrutiny Committee held on the 2nd December, 2013 as an accurate record.

42 CHAIRMANS ANNOUNCEMENTS.

The Chairman advised the Committee of the change in the running order of the agenda and also took the opportunity to advise the Committee of the recent ill health of Councillor L Langford and it was **RESOLVED** that the Committees best wishes be sent to Councillor Langford.

43 GENERAL BUDGET CONSULTATION.

The Director of Finance provided Members with a presentation in respect of the General Budget Consultation Process, advising of the stage 1 consultation feedback, the process for stage 2 and the final funding levels and proposed strategy to be taken forward. He reported that it was intended that the outcome of Stage 2 of the consultation process would be reviewed by Cabinet during mid February 2014 and the final proposals would then be presented to Council.

Following the presentation Members were invited to provide comments on the proposed strategy, which would be done through a series of questions.

RESOLVED: That the views of the Environmental Services Scrutiny Committee be passed on to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in consideration of the Council's Revenue Budget Strategy for 2014/15 as follows:

1. Is the uplift proposed reasonable for Schools?

One Member of the Committee commented that the 0.9% proposed increase was acceptable.

Another member commented that he was happy with the proposed figure to protect schools and commented on the difficulties experienced at this time for Governing Bodies.

The Chairman commented that although there was no requirement for schools to contribute to the efficiency saving to close the funding gap, schools should still continue to work in as an efficient manner as possible.

2 Is the Efficiency Expectation Reasonable?

Members of the committee commented on the efficiency savings and thanked the Group Director and staff for continually achieving the efficiency savings required since 2004.

One Member suggested potential savings through reduction of floral displays within town centres. The Head of Leisure, Parks and Countryside thanked the Member for the suggestion.

Officers were queried as to the involvement in staff with providing suggestions for efficiency savings and further queried whether an incentive scheme was in place to encourage staff with suggestions. The Director, Financial Services advised that staff were consulted upon and the Group Director, Environmental Services spoke of the incentive scheme within his service in respect of the monthly Directors Award. The Director, Finance also commented on the 'Bottom Up' approach within the Authority for taking forward ideas and also commented upon the corporate wide schemes in place in relation to efficiency savings, such as utilising new technology and smarter procurement.

One Member commented on the potential savings to be made within departments by reducing postage cost and utilising Email communication more efficiently. The Director, Finance Service thanked the Member for the suggestion.

The Chairman requested the £4.0M efficiency savings expected to be delivered in 2014/15 in terms of a percentage figure and the Director advised that he would come back with the detail. The Chairman also suggested a reduction in the staff working week as a potential savings option and the Director, Finance commented that any changes of this sort would require a review of Terms and Conditions of all staff.

3. Medium Term Financial Planning – What are your views on the use of this Transitional Funding.

A member of the Committee commented that he had no problem with utilising the transitional funding; as if this was not used then the Authority would not be able to balance the budget

4 Council Tax – Views on the increased proposal.

One Member referred to his previous comments during stage 1 of the consultation in respect of keeping the Council Tax level lower than 4%, although he now recognised that given the additional £641k additional income by raising the Council Tax level by each extra 1%, so was therefore supportive of the increase proposed.

Another Member commented on the potential discontent from the public with the proposed rise in Council Tax levels in light of the recent service cuts across the Authority and the further proposed cuts to service. The Director, Finance commented that whilst the Council Tax level was only a small element of the full budget position, it was a key income element that the Council could influence. The Director referred to previous feedback received during stage 1 of the consultation in respect of support for increased Council Tax levels in exchange for continuation of services.

One Member queried the systems in place when residents default on Council Tax payments and the Director; Finance advised of the current recovery

process in place and also reminded Members of the means tested Council Tax reduction scheme which supports those unable to pay in full or in part with their Council Tax. Members of the Committee further queried the percentage of residents exempt from paying Council Tax under the scheme and the Director; Finance advised that there were about thirty thousand people exempt from paying Council Tax across the Authority.

5. Any other Comments?

One Member queried the previous suggestion made by a Member of the Committee in respect of Council Tax payments being made over a 12 month period rather than 10 months to assist residents with smaller monthly contributions. The Director, Finance commented that the general rule was for a 10 month period, although individual cases could be looked into.

Following a query the Director, Finance confirmed that stage 2 of the general budget consultation was available online.

REPORTS OF THE GROUP DIRECTOR, ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES.

44 REFUSE AND RECYCLING.

Through his report the Service Director, StreetCare provided the Committee with an update on the current position in regard to the recent changes in the refuse and recycling service.

The Service Director reminded the Committee of the background to the changes, which involved a change from weekly to fortnightly collection of black bags / bins from June 2013, whilst the recycling service remained on a weekly basis. The Service Director commented that as part of the fortnightly collection the Council also introduced a weekly opt in nappy recycling scheme whereby a resident could register to be part of the scheme and have their nappies collected on a weekly basis. The Service Director commented that the introduction of the fortnightly collections was two fold, commenting on the financial savings to be made as well as the envisaged improvement with recycling figures

The officer reminded Members of the impact of the service changes during the initial implementation stage, with disruption to the service due to volume of recycling, confusion with collection days and collections being missed by the service. The high take up of the nappy recycling scheme also impacted upon the service. The Committee were advised that there had been a drop in bulky waste collections since the changes and that flytipping had increased slightly and also advised of the reduction in the sustainable waste management grant

Members of the Committee were advised that despite initial difficulties with the collection the change to the service was now running well and it was

advised that Welsh Government figures indicated that Rhondda Cynon Taf were the most improved Council in Wales for recycling for the first two quarters of the year. Going forward, the Service Director also advised of the purchase of new fleet vehicles which would further improve the service.

Members of the Committee expressed their thanks to the Service Director, StreetCare and his staff both in and outside of the office for the service provided and spoke positively of the improvement in recycling figures across the Authority. Committee members queried the provisions in place to further educate residents on the collection days and the Service Director spoke of the hard work of the team who identify areas of potential confusion with collection days and work in that area to solve any issues. The Service Director advised that fining of residents was a last resort.

Other queries related to nappy scheme collection and trade waste and the Service Director spoke of the proposed new incentives within the trade waste area to try to encourage traders to recycle.

The Chairman referred back to the previous meeting when the Committee considered the Quarter 2 position and the services overspend. The Service Director reminded the Committee of the reasons for the overspend in the area including the cut to the sustainable waste management grant and confirmed that savings were being made in the area and advised that there would be a balanced budget for the next financial year.

On behalf of the Committee the Chairman thanked the officer for his update and the Committee **RESOLVED** to note the report.

45 DOG FOULING – BARK OR BITE.

The Service Director, Street Care provided the Committee with a PowerPoint presentation in respect of Dog fouling. The Committee were advised that under the Dogs (Fouling of Land) Act 1996 it is an offence to allow a dog to foul in a public place and fail to clean it up and dispose of it properly. The Service Director provided Members with details surrounding the health hazards associated with dog fouling and the severity of the problem since 2005, noticing a rise from 11.8% to 28.2% in 2007, of dog fouling being evident on the streets within Rhondda Cynon Taf. The Service Director informed the Committee of the provisions put in place since 2007 to tackle the problem, including a high profile campaign, new initiatives including the good dog owners scheme and in addition the fines and the fixed penalty notices provided to dog owners committing an offence.

The presentation was concluded with the Service Director providing stats on the problem since 2007, which illustrated that in 2008 dog fouling was evident on 15.7% of streets and falling to 7.8% in 2009 although steadily rising again over the years to 15.7% in 2012. The Service Director commented on the increase advising that residents were now more willing to report cases of dog fouling unlike in previous years.

Members of the Committee spoke of the issues with the problem and the Service Director was queried on the independent assessment by Keep Wales Tidy and the officer advised that the assessment was unannounced and took into consideration issues relating to fly posting, litter and dog fouling.

The Committee **RESOLVED** to note the contents of the presentation.

46 SCORES ON THE DOORS – IMPLEMENTATION OF THE FOOD HYGIENE RATING SCHEME.

With the assistance of a PowerPoint presentation the Food & Health & Safety Manager provided Members with an update on the implementation of the Food Hygiene Rating Scheme in Rhondda Cynon Taf, including the impact of the Food Hygiene Rating (Wales) Act 2013, introduced by the Welsh Government in November 2013.

The Officer advised the Committee of the purpose of the rating scheme which was to allow consumers to make informed choices about the places where they eat out or shop for food and with the overarching aim of reducing the incidence of food borne illness and the associated costs to the economy. Members were advised of the success of the voluntary scheme since October 2010 and following the Welsh Government's Food Hygiene Rating (Wales) Act 2013, the rating was now a statutory requirement. The Officer advised that Food businesses were now required by law to display food hygiene rating stickers and advised that ratings must be verbally provided on request. Members of the Committee were also advised of the progress with implementation advising that the 84.63% of food businesses within the Authority were broadly compliant and 1691 food hygiene ratings of food establishments within RCT were currently published on the food hygiene rating schemes' website.

The Food & Health & Safety Manager also advised the Committee of the resource implications with the standard, with the potential increase in the number of 're-rating' requests received, which could potentially have an impact on the workload of the team. Members were also advised that funding opportunities had been made available to the Authority to assist with work associated with the Food Hygiene Rating Scheme.

The Presentation was concluded by the officer confirming that the introduction of the voluntary food hygiene rating scheme in 2010 has proved to be an effective tool in driving up the standards of food hygiene at food premises across the County Borough and further improvement in food law compliance should be witnessed due to its statutory footing.

The Chairman thanked the Officer for the detailed presentation and report before Members and the chairman opened up the item to the Committee for questions.

Members of the Committee questioned the frequency of visits to business premises and the requirements for food waste storage. The Food & Health & Safety Manager advised that frequency of visits was outlined under the food law code of practice and also advised that food waste needed to be stored appropriately to avoid contamination. Members also queried the transition period for implementation of the statutory scheme and the officer confirmed that there was an 18 month transition period for the scheme.

One Member queried the action taken by the Authority in respect of zero rated premises and the Food & Health & Safety Manager confirmed that proportionate action was taken, with a range of enforcement options available to the service. The Committee also observed the effects of social media with the scheme and the Food and Health & Safety Manager also commented upon the Welsh Governments proposed consideration of promoting the ratings through menus and websites.

Following discussions the Committee **RESOLVED:-**

- a) To note the content of the report and presentation
- b) To receive a copy of the presentation via email.

Cllr G Davies
Chairman

The meeting closed at 18:40pm.

This page intentionally blank