

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL
FINANCE AND PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting of the Finance and Performance Scrutiny Committee held at the County Borough Council Offices, The Pavilions, Cambrian Park, Clydach Vale on Monday, 18th December, 2017 at 5 p.m.

PRESENT

County Borough Councillor M.J.Powell – in the Chair

County Borough Councillors

J.Cullwick
G.R.Davies
J.Elliott
G.Holmes
C.J.Willis
R.Yeo

Non Committee Members in Attendance

County Borough Councillor L.M.Adams – Chair of Overview & Scrutiny Committee
Mr.R.Hull – Chair and Lay Member of the Audit Committee
County Borough Councillor M.A.Norris – Cabinet Member for Corporate Services

Officers in Attendance

Mr.C.B.Jones – Director, Legal & Democratic Services
Mr.P.Mee – Director, Public Health, Protection & Community Services
Mr.B.Davies – Director of Financial Services
Mr.P.Griffiths – Service Director, Performance & Improvement
Ms.M.Warburton – HR Advisor, Equality & Diversity Team
Ms.K.May – Head of Democratic Services

20 **CHAIR**

The former Chair of the Committee, County Borough Councillor G.R.Davies, congratulated County Borough Councillor M.J.Powell on taking up his new role as Chair of the Finance & Performance Scrutiny Committee, following the decision made at the Council meeting held on the 29th November, 2017.

21 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from County Borough Councillors S.Bradwick, W.Lewis, S.Rees-Owen and T.Williams.

22 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

RESOLVED – to note that in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct there were no personal declarations made at the meeting pertaining to the agenda.

23 MINUTES

RESOLVED – to approve as an accurate record the minutes of the meeting of the Finance & Performance Scrutiny Committee held on the 23rd October, 2017.

24 MATTERS ARISING

Following the meeting of this Committee held on the 23rd October 2017, and prior to today's meeting, Members had been provided with responses to the points raised under Agenda Items 'Council Performance Report (Quarter 1) and 'Review of 2017/18 Performance Indicator Targets'. The feedback covered the following areas:

- Clarity on the reasons for the below target performance in respect of Measure 21 SSOF21 - 'The average length of time older people (aged 65 or over) are supported in residential care homes (days)'.
- 2016/17 sickness absence information for other local authorities in Wales to enable the Council's performance to be considered in the context of the national picture.
- Further information on the range of services in place to support children and their families in the context of below target performance in quarter 1 for the performance indicator '% of children and young people requiring intervention from statutory services'.
- Further information on the 2017/18 target set for the 'Number of library visits per 1,000 population' in the context of a reduction in opening hours was likely to be an influencing factor for the lower target (i.e. 2016/17 actual performance of 3,950 and 2017/18 target of 3,285) and in addition, what action was the Council taking to pick up those residents who are not anticipated to visit libraries and was there any correlation with footfall in town centres?

In addition, the Service Director, Performance & Improvement informed the Committee that:

- Members will shortly be furnished with the appropriate electronic devices to assist them in carrying out their role as Members of this Committee more effectively, for example, by enabling more interactive review of scrutiny papers using the electronic links included in reports to more

detailed information. The Service Director added that the relevant support and training will also be provided.

- In response to the query raised by a Member at the meeting of this Committee held on the 23rd October 2017 in respect of formulating a new performance indicator around dog fouling, the Service Director, Performance & Improvement provided feedback from the Director, Streetcare & Highways in that it would be difficult to formulate an all encompassing and meaningful indicator for this area. As an alternative, the Director of Streetcare & Highways confirmed that he would attend meetings of this Committee on a periodic basis to update Members on the progress made with the Public Spaces Protection Order that came into force on the 1st October, 2017.

25 PRESENTATION – REVENUE BUDGET CONSULTATION

The Director of Financial Services provided Members with a presentation in respect of the 2018/19 Revenue Budget Strategy Consultation and up dated the Committee under the following headings:

- General Approach for 2018/19
- Provisional Local Government Settlement – Headlines
- Implications for Rhondda Cynon Taf
- Consultation
 - Budget
 - Simulator
 - Corporate Plan
 - Council Tax Reduction Scheme
- Budget Setting Timetable

Following the up date, the Director of Financial Services indicated that the overview intended to assist Members in formulating their responses to a number of questions to be posed to the Committee in its role as a consultee as part of the 2018/19 Revenue Budget Strategy Consultation process.

The Director of Financial Services sought feedback from the Committee on a number of areas and the views of elected Members are noted below.

With regard to the question around should the Council 'maintain as many services at the current level as possible even if it meant a reasonable increase in Council Tax to contribute towards closing the budget gap or cutting services to keep any increase in Council Tax to a minimum', Members fed back the need to balance the protection of frontline services alongside meeting the needs of the public.

In terms of the question around 'what would be your preferred level of Council Tax increase for next year' (i.e. 0%, 1%, 3%, 5% or over 5%), the views expressed by some Members were:

- It should not go up by more than 3%; and
- There needs to be the identification of further efficiency savings to limit the increase in Council Tax.

In addition for this area, Members discussed the possibility of varying the level of council tax for different areas within the County Borough. The Director of Financial Services provided confirmation to Members that there is no statutory basis for this in that there is a legal requirement to have a single level of council tax each year that applies to all community areas of a local authority (excluding variations as a result of areas with Community Councils). The Director informed Members that the Council Tax Base report 2018/19 is to be reported to Cabinet on 19th December 2017.

In respect of the question around the proposal to 'protect school budgets and increase it by £1M overall compared to an overall decrease in funding the Council has received of -0.2%', Member feedback was:

- This is considered to be reasonable treatment; and
- Whilst the proposed increase is welcomed, a £1M increase in the context of the total budget for schools will still not fully meet their budget requirement.

With regard to the question relating to fees and charges, some members fed back that:

- School meal prices should not be increased;
- There should be an opportunity to increase fees and charges for Leisure Services based on users, generally, being able to afford to pay more;
- There should be a consultation process with sports clubs before any changes to fees and charges are considered there; and
- There should be no or only very small increases for homecare.

In addition, Members noted that it would be helpful to have sight of all fees and charges made by the Council. The Director of Financial Services confirmed that a full schedule of all Council Fees and Charges is published on the Council's website and this would be forwarded through to Members.

In terms of the question around should the Council focus on the areas of Digitalisation, Early Intervention and Prevention, Commercialisation, Efficiency and Independence to support the delivery of Corporate Plan priorities, Members expressed the need to receive further information on these areas to enable informed views to be provided. The Director of Financial Services indicated that progress up dates on the Council's Corporate Plan priorities are

produced on a quarterly basis for review / approval by Cabinet and thereafter the Finance and Performance Scrutiny Committee, and up dates on the five areas of focus will be reported to Members as and when appropriate proposals are drafted.

In relation to the question on investment priorities, Members fed back that:

- The impact of investment in highways, regeneration and leisure facilities is visible and positive; and
- Further investment is needed in the Rhondda area on highways infrastructure and town centre regeneration to attract more people to shop in the local area.

With specific regard to the questions around the Council Tax Reduction Scheme, the following responses were fed back by Members:

- ‘Do you think that 4 weeks is a reasonable period to continue paying Council Tax Reduction when someone returns to work?’
 - Yes, this is a good system; and
 - Yes, would support the continuation of this approach.
- ‘Do you think that it is reasonable for the Council to continue to totally exclude War Disablement and War Widow’s Pensions income when assessing entitlement to the Council Tax Reduction scheme?’
 - Yes, these elements should continue to be excluded.
- ‘Do you think that 3 months is a reasonable period to backdate claims for working age and pensioner claimants?’
 - Would support the back dating of claims being increased to 6 months.

RESOLVED – that the views of Members as outlined above be fed into the budget consultation process.

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC HEALTH, PROTECTION & COMMUNITY SERVICES

26 BEREAVEMENT FEES AND CHARGES FOR WAR VETERANS AND SERVICE MEN AND WOMEN – NOTICE OF MOTION

Pursuant to Minute No.17 of the meeting of this Committee held on the 23rd October, 2017, the Director, Public Health, Protection & Community Services set out in his report, a list of the agencies that had been approached and invited to comment on the Council's proposals together with details of the draft policy.

Following a lengthy discussion, it was **RESOLVED** –

1. That the following amendments be made to the draft policy:-

Under the heading `Eligibility`

- the first bullet point to read as follows:-

“Any veteran, resident in Rhondda Cynon Taf that has served with the Armed Forces (including National Service) for the minimum length of service required”.

- No amendments to be made to the second bullet point.

- Paragraph 4.3 to read as follows:-

“For the purposes of this policy “active service” will mean any service personnel that have been deployed”.

2. Members agreed that the Council should apply a reduction of 25% in the total costs of all bereavement services provided as outlined in paragraph 4.6 of the report.
3. That the policy be applied as a pilot and reviewed after 12 months.
4. That the Director, Public Health, Protection & Community Services report the recommendations of this Committee, as outlined in 1 - 3 above, to the Cabinet as part of the wider considerations around fees and charges.

27 COUNCIL PERFORMANCE REPORT – 30TH SEPTEMBER 2017 (QUARTER 2)

The Director of Financial Services provided Members with an overview of the Council's performance both from a financial and operational perspective,

based on the first six months of the financial year i.e. to the 30th September, 2017.

The Chair of the Health & Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee informed Members that at the meeting of this Committee held on the 13th December 2017, a presentation was received on Delayed Transfers of Care setting out that there are now hospital based Social Workers as well as hospital Discharge Co-ordinators in place. The Member indicated that he was pleased to note that an improved 2017/18 target had been set for the rate of delayed transfer of care for social care reasons compared to the 2016/17 performance level (i.e. 4.5 compared to 4.95) and that performance at 30th September 2017 was better than the target set. The Member also indicated that a working group is being established as part of the Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee to undertake a review of Elderly Mentally Infirm nursing beds within Rhondda Cynon Taf with the aim of supporting further improvement in this area.

A question was raised in respect of the progress being made around the roll out of agile working. The Director of Financial Services indicated that the roll out is part of a wider programme of work over the medium term to provide officers with a range of technology to help to further improve service delivery and efficiency, for example, care assessments undertaken electronically in clients homes and the results automatically fed into the central system for more timely action and the roll out of video conferencing and on-line document sharing to reduce travel time / costs. The Director added that the programme will be accompanied by support for officers to help them take maximum advantage of the range of technology and will also complement the Council's work to provide customers with further opportunities to interact digitally with the Council.

A Member requested whether more contextual information could be included within future reports against relevant performance indicator results, for example, inclusion of the number of clients for the performance indicator ‘% of adults who completed a period of reablement and have no package of care and support 6 months later’. The Service Director – Performance and Improvement confirmed that contextual information would be included in future reports for specific performance indicators.

Following consideration of the report, it was **RESOLVED** – to note the Council's financial and operational performance position as at the 30th September, 2017 (Quarter 2).

M.POWELL

CHAIR

The meeting closed at 7.35 p.m.