

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held at the County Borough Council Offices, The Pavilions, Cambrian Park, Clydach Vale on Wednesday, 4th February, 2015 at 5 p.m.

PRESENT:

County Borough Councillor R.K.Turner – in the Chair

County Borough Councillors

H.Boggis	P.Jarman	G.Thomas
S.Bradwick	(Mrs.)C.Leyshon	(Mrs.)J.S.Ward
(Mrs.)J.Cass	M.A.Norris	C.J.Williams
G.R.Davies	S.Rees	C.J.Willis
P.Griffiths	R.W.Smith	

Officers in Attendance:

Mr.P.J.Lucas – Director of Legal & Democratic Services

Mr.B.Davies – Director of Financial Services

Ms.K.May – Head of Democratic Services

26 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from County Borough Councillors (Mrs.)M.E.Davies and P.Wasley.

27 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

RESOLVED to note that in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct, the following declarations of interest were made at the meeting:

- County Borough Councillor G.R.Davies – Agenda Item 3 – General Budget Consultation Process (Stage 2) – “I am a user of the Trade Waste scheme”.
- County Borough Councillor P.Jarman – Agenda Item 3 – General Budget Consultation Process (Stage 2) – “On the 4th November, 2014, following a request I made to the Standards Committee, I was granted a dispensation in my capacity as Leader of the Opposition to speak and vote at meetings of the Council and Overview and Scrutiny Committees on matters relating to all services affected by the budget process for a period leading up to and including the formal approval of the budget for 2015/2016 by the Council”.

28 MINUTES

RESOLVED – to approve as an accurate record the minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on the 17th December, 2014.

REPORTS OF THE DIRECTOR OF LEGAL AND DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

29 GENERAL BUDGET CONSULTATION PROCESS (STAGE 2)

The Director of Financial Services, with the aid of PowerPoint slides that had been presented to the four Scrutiny Service Committees reminded Members of the key elements of the proposed revenue budget strategy and reported that there had been a wide range of comments made in respect of the proposals at the meetings of the Scrutiny Committees as shown at the appendices circulated and which would be fed back to the Cabinet on the 12th February, 2015.

The Chairman asked Members whether they had any further comments that they wished to add for consideration and the following discussion points are set out below:

1. Is the uplift proposed reasonable for schools?

The Chair of the Education and Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee reiterated the comment that was made at her Committee, in that whilst Members felt it was reasonable it was difficult to comment upon when not knowing the detail of the Education Improvement Grant, so therefore could not have an overall view.

A Member also raised concerns on the proposed service cuts to the Music Service, which formed part of the Education budget, on which a decision had not been made.

2. Is the efficiency expectation reasonable?

A Member referred back to the points that he had made at the Community and Children's Services Scrutiny Committee that whilst it seemed reasonable to put the £5M of general efficiency forward but posed the question could it be achieved as in his view it led to (1) a gradual erosion of a service and (2) it gives out the message that local government is inefficient. In response the Director of Financial Services again confirmed that the £5M of general efficiency is supported by detailed and robust plans for delivery and confirmed that the current year's £4M of efficiencies had been realised.

3. Do you agree with the other elements of the budget strategy?

In respect of Trade Waste collections, Members were generally of the view that as a result of the increase in charges, businesses should be encouraged to participate more in recycling which would have a positive effect on the Council's recycling performance figures. However, it was pointed out by one Member that some businesses could be penalised due to some waste materials not being recyclable e.g. contaminated waste such as from butchery / fishmongery businesses whereby contaminated waste could not be recycled and the businesses concerned would have no choice other than to use landfill. The possibility of trade waste being collected in the evenings to avoid peak time collections was also generally welcomed.

4. Medium Term Financial Planning – What are your views on the use of transition funding?

A Member commented on the feedback provided at the service scrutiny committee that "if you are skint then you have to use your savings".

Another Member questioned whether there were any other reserves available if the transitional funding could not be replenished next year as the problem would be exacerbated year on year. In response, the Director of Financial Services reported that a review of earmarked reserves will again be undertaken as part of the closure of this year's accounts.

A further query was raised as to whether some of the revenue could be converted to capital expenditure e.g. underwriting some of the highways projects and funding out of capital receipts. The Director of Financial Services indicated that the capital receipts that are generated were fully needed to fund the existing capital programme.

5. What are your views on the proposed increase in Council Tax?

Members raised concern on the precept of 5% set by the South Wales Police, which whilst it was appreciated that it is shown separately on the bills that are sent to residents, people were of the mindset that the whole amount is down to the Council.

One Member referred to the comments made by the Director of Financial Services at the meeting of the Corporate Services Scrutiny Committee "*that based on the information currently available the Council's proposed 3.8% increase would put the Authority in the bottom quartile for Council Tax*

increases”, however, she indicated that this did not reflect on the current level of charges made by neighbouring authorities and provided the example of Cardiff whereby on a Band A property the Council Tax is £771 compared to Rhondda Cynon Taf which is £974. She further stated that although the Council was in the bottom quartile for Council Tax, it was the fourth highest Council Tax in Wales and whereas Bridgend was classed as the fifth highest Council Tax in Wales, for a Band D property the Council Tax charge was £48 less than for a Band D property in Rhondda Cynon Taf. She was also of the view that more and more people will become entitled to council tax relief.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee **RESOLVED** to endorse the views of the four Scrutiny Committees and submit them for consideration by the Cabinet along with the additional comments set out above.

30 UPDATE REPORT – SCRUTINY ACTIVITY

In his report, the Director of Legal and Democratic Services provided Members with a short summary of the work currently being undertaken by the Council’s Scrutiny Committees in the form of Scrutiny Review Working Groups:

- Overview and Scrutiny Committee – “Good Scrutiny! Good Question?”
- Community and Children’s Services – Looked After Children Scrutiny Review
- Education and Lifelong Learning – Looked After Children’s Educational Attainment
- Corporate Services – Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)
- Corporate Services – Planning Scrutiny Working Group
- Environmental Services – Empty Properties Working Group
- Scrutiny of Priority Action Plans

At the meeting, the Head of Democratic Services reported on a meeting that she had recently attended with representatives of OPAG (Older Persons Advisory Group) seeking their views on whether they wished to be further involved in the “Adult Services” (Maintaining People’s Independence) Scrutiny Working Group that had been established during 2013/14 along with other Working Groups which had been convened to scrutinise the draft 2014/15 improvement priority action plans and later on in 2014 were reconvened to consider the delivery of the 2013/14 action plans. It was suggested that the Chair and Vice-Chair of OPAG be co-opted onto the “Adult Services Scrutiny Working Group thereby going from consultation – engagement to involvement.

Members were also reminded of the fact that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee is the Council’s designated Crime and Disorder Committee and is

required to meet at least once each year in this capacity, as the last meeting of the Crime and Disorder Committee was on the 19th March, 2014, it was now necessary to hold a meeting in the very near future. It was proposed that the Committee meets in its Crime and Disorder capacity on Wednesday, 18th March, 2015 and Members were asked to consider which issues they would like to see on the agenda. The Head of Democratic Services suggested that Members might wish to consider receiving a presentation from Mr.P.Mee, Service Director for Public Health and Protection and Mr.A.Mallin, Community Safety and Partnership Manager on The Anti Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act, 2014 – Implications of the New Tools and Powers to tackle Anti-Social Behaviour.

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

1. To note the on-going scrutiny activity
2. That the Chair and Vice-Chair of OPAG be appointed as co-opted members to the “Adult Services” Scrutiny Working Group
3. That the next meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee sitting in its capacity as the Crime and Disorder Committee be held on Wednesday, 18th March, 2015 to receive a presentation on the new Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act, 2014 and that Ms.Sally Burke, Chief Superintendent of Police be invited to the meeting.

**R.K.Turner
Chairman**

The meeting closed at 6.10 p.m.

