

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE TOWN AND COMMUNITY COUNCIL FORUM
HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, CIVIC OFFICES, ANGEL STREET, BRIDGEND
ON MONDAY, 14 JANUARY 2014 AT 4.00PM

Present:

Councillor M E J Nott OBE - Leader and Chairperson

<u>Councillors</u>	<u>Councillors</u>	<u>Councillors</u>
E M Hughes	D G Owen	R Thomas
E Dodd	G Phillips	H J Townsend
E M Hughes	D R Pugh	D B F White
J R McCarthy	C L Reeves	R Williams
H E Morgan	M Reeves	

Town and Community Councillors:

Bridgend	-	R D L Burns
Coychurch Higher	-	N Oram
Maesteg	-	P W Jenkins
Merthyr Mawr	-	W Willis
Newcastle Higher	-	M C Wilkins
Ogmore Valley	-	M Jenkins
Porthcawl	-	M Clarke
Pyle	-	M Kearns
St Brides Minor	-	Y Nott

Officers:

D Mephram	-	Chief Executive
M Lewis	-	Integrated Partnership Manager
M A Galvin	-	Senior Democratic Services Officer - Committees

48 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from the following Members for the reasons so stated:

Councillor R J Hancock OBE	-	Work Commitment
Councillor D Sage	-	Recuperating
Councillor C E Smith	-	Work Commitment
Councillor C Jones	-	No reason given
Councillor A Y Morgan	-	No reason given
Councillor B Nash	-	No reason given

49 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

50 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting of the Town and Community Council Forum of 22 July 2013 be approved as a true and accurate record.

51 MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY AND CHANGE MANAGEMENT PROGRAMME

The Chief Executive submitted a report, that provided Members of the Town and Community Council Forum with further background information on the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) and budget proposals for 2014-15, and the associated Change Management Programme.

The Chief Executive supplemented his report by giving a presentation on the topics in question.

He began by advising Members, that local authorities in Wales and other public services were facing in the next few years unprecedented changes and challenges at a time when there was an increased demand for services the Authority provided.

The Chief Executive explained that this meant that the Council would have to adopt different fundamental approaches in terms of its role and remit, and the way it provided its services.

The Chief Executive confirmed that Members would be no doubt aware of the announcement made in the Autumn that the Authority would be required to save £36m in the next 3 years.

He confirmed that in-keeping with this, the Council would be required to put in place a Change Management Programme, and it was presently considering different models and options for the continued delivery of services and the manner in which these were to be provided.

The Chief Executive explained that there was £134b deficit in UK public finances which Central government were aiming to eliminate by 2017. In relation to this, two thirds of proposed cuts to public services were yet to be made.

He added that funding in the form of welsh grant funding from the UK government was declining, and the country was experiencing an extended period of austerity, which was a contrast when compared to the first 10 years of devolution.

The Chief Executive continued by stating that the BCBC budget this year was £256m, and this was likely to decrease next year. He stated that savings of £36m required by April 2017 were considerable.

He then showed a graph detailing the level of savings that were required in the next 3 or so years, which reflected that other than what was allocated in terms of expenditure for schools, the savings target exceeded the budget allocation for all Council Directorates other than Adult Social Care and Children's (excluding schools). The budgets for these two Directorates he added were also only just above the savings required for the above period.

The Chief Executive also confirmed that the savings required were significant, and needed at a time when population demographics were increasing, and therefore, there was in real terms a case for increase budgets to cater for this, as opposed to these being reduced. The government however had put in place a 10 year plan for public service organisations to reduce their spending, which meant that local authorities such as Bridgend would need to process work differently in the future than it had in the past, and make some tough and uncompromising choices including the development of a smaller streamlined workforce.

In terms of its major priorities, the Council would need to remain focused and re-shape some of its key services in terms of the way these were to be delivered in the future.

Some of these included:-

- Working together to help vulnerable people to stay independent;
- Working with children and families to tackle problems early;
- Working together to tackle health issues and encourage healthy lifestyles;
- Working together to raise ambitions and drive up educational achievement;
- Working together to develop the local economy;
- Working together to make the best use of resources.

The Chief Executive continued by advising that in relation to the second bullet point above, the Authority intended to work with families and children with a view to engaging with them at an earlier age to resolve any problems they may have before these develop further. The Authority were mindful of the increasing numbers of Looked After Children it required to support, which was having a considerable drain on Council resources. Earlier interventions would mean addressing problems sooner and turning these around into more improved outcomes for these families.

There was also an intention to put plans in place to ensure that older people don't lose their independence, and that mechanisms are put in place to support people to live longer at home. If this was done effectively, this would also result in a financial saving to the Authority and its care partners.

The Chief Executive continued by confirming that the Authority would also continue to look at ways to work with other local authorities and partner organisations collaboratively, in order to improve services whilst at the same time achieving savings.

With regard to some finer detail of the 2014-15 Budget, he advised that BCBC required:-

1. To achieve a -3.4% cash cut, in the face of for example, school expenditure being increased by 1% (i.e. in the face of a reduced settlement);
2. To find £1m for the Council Tax Reduction Scheme;
3. To find £2.3 million to meet other inescapable budget pressures.

In respect of the budget shortfall of £13m, the Chief Executive stated that this would be negated by Directorate budget savings totalling around £10m, and Corporate Budget savings of approximately £3m (including increasing Council Tax by 4.98%).

The Chief Executive then outlined the savings proposals identified over the next 3 year period by way of a traffic light symbol indicating in red proposals being developed, amber Implementation Plans being developed, and green

Implementation Plans in Place. This table reflected the savings identified to date and for the next 2 years, as well as those that at present (and for the following 2 years) were as of yet un-identified. The table confirmed that approximately a further £6m of savings on top of the savings already made/proposed remained unaccounted for. He added that ways would continue to be looked at under the Medium Term Financial Strategy and through the Change Management Programme to achieve the savings outstanding, though there would be hard decisions to make in the future in order to realise these savings that would have some impact upon staff, residents and service users. Unfortunately, the extent of savings required made this unavoidable he added.

The Chief Executive then went over some of the Corporate savings proposals, adding that:-

- a) The Cabinet's priority was to protect as many jobs as possible;
- b) Though some budget savings would result in job losses, Management were seeking to manage these as far as possible through freezing vacancies, early retirement and voluntary severance;
- c) Formal consultation was ongoing with Trade Unions to identify measures that could be put in place to reduce the Authority's pay bill, though Unison had withdrawn from negotiations;
- d) GMB and Unite were however intending to ballot their Members on a Pay Freeze for 2014-15 as well as an increment freeze.

The Chief Executive then advised of the different categories of savings proposals for the next 3 years advising that the total savings identified so far amounted to £30,103m which had/was going to be made up from making best use of resources, managed service reductions, collaboration and service transformation and policy changes.

He then outlined for Members some examples of these which were:-

Making Best Use of Resources, such as:

- Maximising the use of space and technology, and relinquishing assets;
- Improving procurement and commissioning;
- Streamlining systems and processes;
- Modernising the school estate;
- Integrating health and social care;
- Integrating council transport services;

Policy Changes, relating to as examples:

- Foster carer payments when in respite care;
- Meals at Home subsidy changes;

Collaboration and transformation proposals, such as with:

- The Youth Offending Service (with Swansea City and Neath Port Talbot Councils);
- More cost effective models of delivery for Home care services;
- Methods of cost cutting for Food waste anaerobic digestion;

Managed Service Reductions, such as:

- Extension of part night switch off of street lights;
- Complex needs play scheme during Easter and Summer holidays;
- Falling school rolls;

The Chief Executive reiterated that the Authority had no option other than to achieve the level of savings required and imposed upon it during the term of the current MTFs, and that the hard choices were where to make these savings.

The Leader then asked Members if they had any questions to put to the Chief Executive on his Presentation.

A Member noted the proposal to collaborate with neighbouring authorities, for example to provide a joint Youth Offending Service. He asked if this was a prelude to the proposed local government re-organisation proposals, as it was inevitable that this would take place within the next few years. He also asked if the local authority could devolve any of its powers to larger Town and Community Councils in order that they could assist in helping the BCBC achieve some of the much needed savings it was required to make.

The Chief Executive confirmed that the Council were looking at collaborative options where it was sensible to pursue these, and in terms of entering into collaborative initiatives with neighbouring local authorities, it was geographically in a favourable location to do so, situate in a location with Neath Port Talbot and Swansea City Councils situate to the west, and the Vale of Glamorgan and Cardiff City Council to the east. He added that options regarding collaborative working were not really related in any way with the possible re-organisation of Welsh local authorities, and that some opportunities that existed now in terms of joint working would close and some would open as a result of the reorganisation proposals. The outcome of the Williams report would shed more light on this he added.

The Chief Executive further added that options to work collaboratively or as partners also included with Town and Community Councils and the third sector. He confirmed that he would be open to hear of any suggestions that Town/Community Councils wish to put forward regarding joint working including any funding support, or areas where they could take over the responsibility for something in place of BCBC.

He advised that the Corporate Director Resources and the Corporate Director Communities had met with Porthcawl Town Council to explore some options in relation to possible joint working arrangements, though it was not always easy to achieve these for reasons of disaggregation, though financial assistance through this way of working would assist support the Council's MTFs.

A Member felt, that as was proposed under the MTFs and Change Management Programme, some protocols, policies and strategies of the Council now required reviewing especially in light of the future challenges that were ahead, as touched upon by the Chief Executive in his Presentation.

One of the issues that may require reviewing he considered, was the allocation of match funding under the Council's Capital Programme to Town and Community Councils (on a 50:50 basis), with a view to attracting more money from Town and Community Councils. This was currently on a £1 : £1 ratio, and could perhaps be increased. He added that it would also be of some use if the local authority became more proactive in terms of connecting more with the Town and Community Councils, ie by possibly setting-up a Member/Officer

Panel, in order to devise a Strategy or Action Plan including service areas where they could provide support to the Council including from a financial perspective. He added that perhaps a report on such a suggested way of working could be presented to a future meeting of the Forum. He concluded by further adding that there were avenues of funding for certain projects that were available to Town and Community Councils, that were not available to local authorities.

The Chief Executive confirmed that he was in agreement with an approach along the above lines, adding that he would liaise further with Corporate Directors to ascertain if any initiatives and/or ideas could be put forward and discussed with individual Town and Community Councils, and these in turn shared with Members, in the form of a report to a future Forum meeting.

The Chief Executive added that the MTFs and Change Management Programme was a strategically planned 3 year venture, and he felt that plans and proposals included within this put the Council in as good a place as other neighbouring authorities when it came to dealing with the challenges that were ahead in terms of achieving projected savings.

A Member also suggested that Town and Community Councils could also consider working with each other on certain initiatives, as well as with the local authority.

The Leader concluded debate on this item by thanking the Chief Executive for his Presentation and Members for their input and suggestions.

RESOLVED: That the report of the Chief Executive and accompanying Presentation be noted.

52 SCHEDULE OF AGENDA ITEMS

The Senior Democratic Services Officer – Committees presented a report on behalf of the Monitoring Officer, which informed the Forum of requests for items to be presented at future meetings as outlined in Appendix A to the report .

RESOLVED: That the Forum noted the report and the items to be considered at future meetings as shown in the attached Appendix A, and also agreed that a further item to be added to the Forward Work Programme for a future meeting entitled “Possible areas for collaborative working between Town and Community Councils and BCBC”.

The meeting closed at 5.00pm.