

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE COMMUNITY, ENVIRONMENT AND LEISURE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD IN COUNCIL CHAMBER, CIVIC OFFICES ANGEL STREET BRIDGEND CF31 4WB ON MONDAY, 18 JANUARY 2016 AT 10.00 AM

Present

Councillor JC Spanswick – Chairperson

DK Edwards
DRW Lewis

CA Green
JR McCarthy

RD Jenkins
G Phillips

CL Jones
R Williams

Officers:

Kym Barker
Sarah Daniel

Democratic Services Officer – Scrutiny
Democratic Services Officer - Committees

Invitees:

Councillor H Williams
Mark Shepherd
Satwant Pryce
Zak Shell
Joanne Norman

Cabinet Member Communities
Corporate Director Communities
Head of Regeneration and Development
Head of Neighborhood Services
Finance Manager – Education, Communities and Transformation

28. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from the following members/ officers for the reasons so stated:

Councillor R M James – Personal Commitment
Councillor K Watts – Family Commitment

29. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None

30. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the Community Environment and Leisure Overview and Scrutiny Committee of 8 October 2015 were approved as a true and accurate record of the meeting subject to the amendment to the job title of Officer from Trecco Bay Holiday Park

31. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE

The Scrutiny Officer presented the report to the Committee with items that were due to be considered at the Committee meeting to be held on 27 January 2016 and sought confirmation of the information required for the subsequent scheduled meeting to be held on 23 March 2016

RESOLVED:

- Members agreed the item on the Vibrant and Viable Places Programme would be presented at the meeting on 27 January 2016.
- Members requested that the item on the Procurement of Waste Management Services at the Materials Recovery and Energy Centre (MREC) be scheduled as the second item for the meeting 27 January 2016.
- Members agreed that items on Social Housing Allocation Policy (Common Housing Register) and the Housing function within BCBC and a report on the Cultural Partnership would be scheduled for the meeting on 23 March 2016.

32. DRAFT BUDGET CONSULTATION 2016-17

The Scrutiny Officer introduced the report to the Scrutiny Committee with the draft MTFS 2016-17 to 2019-20 which included a financial forecast for 2016-20 and a detailed draft revenue budget for 2016-17

Members were concerned at the loss of funding for community based regeneration projects as this area seemed to be badly hit year after year. Members asked how the budget reduction would impact on the Directorate. The Corporate Director Communities advised that this area was marked green as the savings had already been delivered and a restructure proposal was underway. The Head of Regeneration and Development added that managing a change in expectation would be the most difficult challenge as staffing levels had been reduced by a third and the service had no Group Manager.

Members were concerned at the proposed reduction in budget to Ground Maintenance and Bereavement Services. They stated that this was a concern with constituents as the Borough was looking more run down and untidy every week with pot holes, grass cutting, litter and dog fouling not being tended to as often as they needed. Members felt the budget should have seen an increase in this area and not a reduction.

Members also noted that fees had increased in bereavement services and were now amongst the highest in Wales but service levels had decreased. They stated that the increase in fees should be put back into the service as it was upsetting and disrespectful for members of the public to see overgrown and run down grounds. Members added if the service was not covering its own costs then it should look at how other Authorities operate or if it was more viable to externalise the service. The Head of Neighbourhood Services stated that the Authority could look at the possibility of re-investing the fees but the budget reductions would need to be achieved elsewhere. Another option to outsource the maintenance of the grounds would need to be approved by Cabinet and a tender put out for the contract.

Members sought clarification on the reduction to the Grounds and Maintenance Services and asked what percentage the reduction equated to. They were also concerned that they did not have previous years reduction figures available to them so they were unable to see the true reflection of the reduction to the service overall. The Finance Manager - Education, Communities and Transformation stated that the reduction equated to 6% and the previous years' reduction was 24%.

A Member suggested that by not tending to general wear and tear this could potentially be costing the Authority more in damages and repairs. The Corporate Director

Communities advised that the Authority were unable to maintain services as they did previously due to budget pressures in all areas. He added the Authority were also looking to relieve the pressures through the Community Asset Transfer Scheme.

A Member asked if the Authority would be able to deliver at a Local Government level if approached by Welsh Government to support a new transport infrastructure system. The Head of Regeneration and Development stated that the Authority would prioritise such a scheme so they would be able to support and contribute to the scheme.

The Chairperson asked how the Highways Maintenance Service would look in the future with the proposed reduction in budget to the service. The Head of Neighbourhood Services advised that a few changes were already underway which included the restructuring of the traffic transport team and energy saving of street lighting which was projected to save approximately £150k. The Corporate Director Communities added that there were also proposed changes to the current method of street work management from its current noticing method to that of a permit scheme.

A Member suggested there could be a potential saving if there were not so many traffic lights in the area. He stated that the amount of traffic lights in the area deterred people from visiting the area as they caused more disruption and did not help traffic flow in the area. He stated the Authority should look at the possibility of using some of the traffic signals on a part time basis to ease traffic flow issues and reduce costs.

A Member queried the reduction in the maintenance budget and was concerned that as the service level would have to reduce this would mean that repairs to pot holes would be left longer and also if streets would now be left out of winter gritting due to the number of gritters being reduced from 4 to 3.

The Head of Neighbourhood Services stated that a statutory function of the Authority was to repair potholes that were a certain size so the public would not see a difference to the service in the future. However, they would be looking at how the roads were resurfaced overall. He added that the reduction to the winter gritting would be achieved without removing streets from the gritting route – however they would be reviewing the route maps to see if savings could be achieved in that area. The Corporate Director Communities added that a Corporate bid for funding had been made to increase highways services – if successful he explained that the resurfacing of highways would improve.

A Member asked if the reduction in highways budget included the drainage systems as they were concerned that these needed regular maintenance to prevent damages caused by blockages. The Head of Neighbourhood Services stated that the drainage systems were part of the “Invest to Save” initiative and they needed regular inspections and would continue to do so. He added they would be reviewing the frequency to ensure that they were adequately maintained.

Members questioned how the £15k reduction would be achieved to the Bus Services. The Corporate Director Communities advised that it would be achieved through reducing administration costs and reviewing the routes of some services.

Members questioned the £75k of extra income for the planning department. The Head of Regeneration and Development stated that this was due to a price increase for planning fees, however the extra income had already been used to mitigate the impact in other areas of the service. She added that whilst the increase in funding was welcomed, as part of the Wales Planning Act applications now had to be determined

within 6 weeks or a refund of the application fee would be issued resulting in added pressures for the service.

Members asked where the highest amount of overtime was in the Authority. The Head of Neighbourhood Services advised that there was a high amount of overtime payments for work relating to works for the M4 as this work had to be completed at night, however some of the costs relating to this could be recovered from WG. He added that there would be a review of the seasoned hours for Parks/ Playing Fields and a review of works to local roads which may need to be rescheduled to daytime to reduce overtime payments. He added that a review was already underway of staff on standby for emergency call outs, which would be reduced if the service need allowed.

A Member was concerned at the proposed reduction of current weed spraying to one spray per annum. He added that this could cost more in the longer term in damage/ repair costs. He added that the time of year that the spraying takes place should also be reviewed as they currently take place just a month apart in September and October and perhaps earlier in the year would be more beneficial and cost effective.

Members asked how Awen Cultural Trust would achieve their budget reduction. The Corporate Director Communities advised that the reductions was known to Awen before they were officially formed. He advised that they have more flexibility than the Authority would have to develop and find different ways of achieving savings.

The Cabinet Member Resources stated that Cabinet CMB had been working on the proposals for several months and while some were unpalatable, the reality was that the Authority needed to save £30million. He added that Members should not lose sight of the Corporate priorities and that providing a good standard of education was very important in giving them the best opportunities for their future.

Conclusions

- Members asked the Officers to clarify any changes or omissions to proposals as a result of recent changes to the requirement for savings. The Officer identified the changes and explained the rationale for them.
- Members noted the public support for community services from the consultation exercise 'Shaping Bridgend's Future' and queried whether these findings had been taken into account when prioritising revisions to budget reductions. The Officer responded that there had been some adjustment for some services, such as highways, as a result of feedback from the consultation.
- Members were concerned that the required savings for several of the proposals would result in a deterioration of the appearance of the county and that this would make the area less attractive to businesses and visitors.
- Members raised concerns that carrying out less maintenance work may result in more claims and costs in the long term.
- Members noted that there was currently good service provision in place for responding to issues with pot holes in roads and raised concerns that this was an example of a 'visible' service which will now be at risk due to the requirement for savings.
- Members queried what would happen if the proposals relating to savings for services covered by Cultural Trust were not achieved. The Officer responded that the Trust were

aware of the requirement and had greater flexibility than the Authority in the way it can manage services.

- Members noted the budget reductions attached to Bereavement Services which may lead to a reduction in general ground maintenance activities and raised concerns that the cost to the public for the services is going up while the quality of services is diminished. Members queried whether the service should be 'standalone' so that the increased charges could be re-invested into the service and therefore not be subject to a reduction in standards due to the cut backs in other areas.
- Members commented that regeneration would be badly hit and that, for example, this could impact on the ability of the Authority to deliver on their part of any potential opportunities link to City Deal. The Officer responded that there would be a need to focus resources on the most viable activities to ensure resilience and sustainability.
- Members queried whether the 'Invest to Save' proposal which is currently being worked up for highways to inform a business case includes resurfacing and drainage, the Officer responded that it does.
- Members queried whether the amount of savings linked to the reduction in weed spraying and in road marking maintenance justify the long term risk.
- Members supported the corporate project to reduce overtime payments across the council and asked for examples of where this is happening within the Communities directorate. The Officer responded that some overtime occurs when work is required on or around the M4 but that costs can be recovered from this. Other overtime work linked to, for example, local roadworks, parks and playing fields and the call centre is part of the current review.

Recommendations

- The Committee recommend that a review of weed spraying to ensure that this is carried out in a timely manner to ensure maximum effect.

Further Information requested

- The Committee requested further information on the proposal 'COM9' which covers the review of highways maintenance/DLO services. The Committee requests detailed information on how this service is expected to look following staffing reductions and service reconfiguration to enable them to decide whether an item on the review should be included in the 2016-17 Forward Work Programme.

The Committee requested further information on the recurrent pressure relating to public transport.

33. URGENT ITEMS

None

The meeting closed at 12.20 pm