

COMMUNITY, ENVIRONMENT AND LEISURE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - MONDAY, 19 DECEMBER 2016

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE COMMUNITY, ENVIRONMENT AND LEISURE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD IN COMMITTEE ROOMS 2/3, CIVIC OFFICES ANGEL STREET BRIDGEND CF31 4WB ON MONDAY, 19 DECEMBER 2016 AT 2.00 PM

Present

Councillor JC Spanswick – Chairperson

DK Edwards	CA Green	CL Jones	JR McCarthy
HE Morgan	KJ Watts	R Williams	

Apologies for Absence

CJ James, G Phillips and JH Tildesley MBE

Officers:

Sarah Daniel	Scrutiny Support Officer
Mark Galvin	Senior Democratic Services Officer – Committees

Invitees:

Cllr HM Williams	Deputy Leader
Cllr C Reeves	Cabinet Member - Communities
Joanne Norman	Finance Manager - Education, Transformation and Communities
Satwant Pryce	Head of Regeneration and Planning
Zak Shell	Head of Neighbourhood Services
Mark Shephard	Corporate Director – Communities

75. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None

76. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of a meeting of the Community, Environment and Leisure Overview and Scrutiny Committee dated 20 October 2016, be approved as a true and accurate record.

77. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE

The Corporate Director – Operational and Partnership Services submitted a report, the purpose of which, was to present the items due to be considered at the Committee's meeting to be held on 26 January 2017, and also to present a list of further potential items for prioritisation by the Committee.

Paragraph 4.1 outlined the items for the meeting scheduled to take place on 26 January 2017, whilst paragraph 4.2 listed potential items for the subsequent meeting scheduled to be held on 30 March 2017.

The Chairperson advised that he would be unable to attend the meeting on the 30 March 2017, and he asked Members if they would have any objection to the date of the Committee being moved to a week or so before or after the 30th March and they agreed to this request.

RESOLVED: Members noted the agenda items to be considered at the next two scheduled Committee meeting dates on 26 January and 30 March 2017.

78. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2017-18 TO 2020-21

The Chairperson welcomed the Invitees to the meeting, following which the Corporate Director – Communities introduced the report.

The Corporate Director – Communities advised, that Members would no doubt understand the challenges the Authority face as a whole, and that a significant amount of savings were required in his Directorate in order to meet these challenges.

He added that his Directorate had made significant savings under the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy for a number of years, and whilst this was easier in the past, he was now finding it very difficult to meet the ongoing required savings whilst still providing adequate front line services.

The service areas where savings were required to be made were outlined in the Appendices that supported the covering report, and he was taking steps already to look to make the amount of savings required as aligned to these areas. If the savings required in respect of any of the Budget Reduction proposals were not made in any of these required areas, then they would still need to be made in other areas of his Directorate.

Members then referred to the Budget Reduction Proposals as detailed in Appendix B to the report for the period 2017-18 to 2020-21.

In respect of **COM 1**, a Member asked Invitees to explain further the budget reductions proposed in respect of the provision of public toilets.

The Head of Neighbourhood Services advised that as part of the budget cuts going forward, it was intended to close all public toilets by 2018-19 (to achieve £103k savings) and introduce in 2017-18, mobile public toilet cleaning attendants for the towns of Bridgend, Porthcawl and Maesteg only. There was also a proposal in conjunction with this, for Town & Community Councils to be approached for funding to help maintain the cost of providing these facilities.

A Member noted that cleaning of public toilets by mobile attendants would be introduced in the next financial year, and asked how this would affect opening/closing times for the continued provision of these services. He also asked how it was intended to keep these toilets clean, as presumably the service and presence of attendants would only be at certain times of the day. He also felt that the saving required for this appeared to be challenging and asked if the Corporate Director – Communities felt it was achievable.

The Corporate Director – Communities confirmed that there would be a challenge opening and closing these facilities at the allotted times,, as the cleaning attendant(s) would be moving from one facility to another in situate in separate areas of the County Borough. So there would in all probability be a case of 'rolling' opening times. Wherever possible however, this task could be allocated to other designated blue collar staff. The Corporate Director – Communities added that the finer detail regarding operational proposals had yet to be confirmed. He added that he was keen to work with Town/Community Councils, as this was the type of service that they could support and take over completely, resulting in more chance of the saving proposed for 2018-19 being

realised. Local businesses would also be approached he added, to see if they would be willing to participate in the reintroduction of the Comfort scheme

The Chairperson commented that he was concerned about the continued level of cuts to be borne by the Communities Directorate, particularly as the services affected were those that supported the general public and constituents. He felt that some of these cuts could be negated by an increase in Council Tax over and above that which was being proposed.

The Head of Regeneration, Development and Property Services, reminded the Committee, that the Communities Directorate had made £5m in budget cuts within the last 3 years which equated to 23% of its overall budget allocation during this period.

With regard to ensuring the public toilets are kept clean whilst they were open, the Head of Neighbourhood Services advised, that as the attendants would primarily only be responsible for opening/closing the public conveniences, any facilities that were found to be in a condition not suitable for the visiting public in terms of levels of cleanliness, would only be dealt with 'reactively' ie upon any complaints being made.

A Member referred to **COM 5** and the proposed reduction to the Winter Maintenance Budget, and the fixed hire of gritters for fixed periods. He felt that this could give rise to a problem, as no one could predict when bad weather would occur, and if this fixed period just extended to winter months, then a service may not be provided for example in April, when on occasions there has been cases of inclement weather. He therefore asked if there was scope for provision of this service outside the fixed period of the Contract.

The Head of Neighbourhood Services advised that the intention was to provide one less gritting vehicle, but to still cover the highway routes that were required to be covered during periods when there was inclement weather, including if bad weather took place in autumn/spring as opposed to winter. He added that there was a risk attached to this budget reduction, as there was with most cuts that had to be made in other areas of the Directorate over the term of the MTFs. Routes would be maintained outside the fixed period if required or if extra provision was required for any given period, through the hiring of any further required facilities.

A Member referred to **COM 6** and the proposal to reduce current weed spraying to one spray per annum. He felt that this reduction which equated to 50% was too radical.

The Head of Neighbourhood Services advised the Member that he could provide locations where and when weed spraying regularly took place outside of the meeting. He added that these problem areas would continue to be maintained, but only once as opposed to twice per annum.

The Chairperson advised that he was also concerned of the risk attached to this cut, in that weeds caused an accelerated deterioration in the highway asset requiring more extensive and expensive repairs in the longer term.

With regard to **COM 9**, and the budget reduction proposal for the removal of Security Budget, Waterton, a Member asked for clarification that this entailed any reduction in staffing.

The Corporate Director – Communities advised that the Waterton Depot would occupy a smaller footprint in terms of its overall size in area, and this would allow for a reduced size of the staffing compliment, and this was where the proposed savings would be achieved.

A Member then referred to **COM 11** where it was proposed to look to achieve savings in years 2019-2021 amounting in total to a saving of £270k, by reducing street cleaning by the removal of 1 street cleaning vehicle. As BCBC has 3 main town centres in the County Borough, the Member asked if the vehicles were reduced to 2, which of these towns would lose the service of street cleaning, and would the service then fall short of the minimum requirements as laid down under the Environmental Protection Act.

The Corporate Director – Communities advised that the above service was subject to a performance indicator (P.I.) that was measured by Welsh Government, and if this P.I. fell short of what was required then it could be subject to challenge by the public. The loss of the street cleaning vehicle would be borne between each of the 3 main towns in question rather than 1 town losing out in favour of the other 2. The effect of the reduction of service would mean that this would be equally shared by the towns affected, and that the litter clearing would be reduced within these areas i.e. not cleared so often or so early within any given day. The savings proposed were projected and would look to be reduced if possible, in order to continue to provide an adequate service. He added that if the service was cut to its optimum, this may also at times result in a reactive service.

The Chairperson made reference to **COM 12** and the broad review of car parking charges including staff and elected Member parking passes proposing a savings in 2017-18 of £50k. A Member supplemented this, by asking if further consultation had been undertaken in respect of permits being issued for residents to continue parking in streets, making reference primarily to Bridgend.

The Head of Neighbourhood Services advised that consultations were well advanced with regard to permit car parking arrangements for residents in and around the Bridgend town centre, and in a number of areas of Bridgend, this would continue to be provided. He added that there had been ongoing consultations with the Legal Department over persons holding blue badges and the feasibility of them also using residents parking. He further added that residents parking had also been considered within areas of Porthcawl, however, initially there had been opposition to this by the residents themselves, though with further time their mind set was starting to change

In respect of the review of car parking charges for staff and elected Members, the Head of Neighbourhood Services confirmed that this was being held in abeyance at present, largely due to the fact that there had been changes to and a considerable reduction in available car parking in the town centre, as a result of the works ongoing to the Rhiw development. This review would be revisited next year, and the £50k proposed savings would be realised also in 2017-18 part of which would include expenditure outstanding for the current year. It was anticipated that once the review was completed, this would in turn, result in increased car parking income.

With regard to the up to date position in relation to residents parking, the Head of Neighbourhood Services advised Members that he would inform them of this outside of the meeting.

The Head of Regeneration, Development and Property Services, added that town centre car parks were also struggling to generate income, as visitors were often choosing to park free outside the town centre where this was available. She further added that anyone can purchase a fixed cost quarterly car parking permit, which is beneficial for frequent parkers, including traders at present.

A Member referred to **COM 14** and the reduction in Adult Community Learning provision, and enquired why the £70k earmarked reduction for the next financial year was showing as Red on the traffic light indicators.

The Corporate Director – Communities advised that less courses would be made available within the next financial year, and this was primarily as a result of significantly reduced Communities First funding. This proposed cut was also being shown as not yet achievable, as this was going to be looked at further by Officers. The end result in all probability would be that there would be reduced courses (preference on subject areas to be still available to be steered by Welsh Government) and such reduction also hitting courses previously available in the County Borough's Community Centres and Leisure Centres.

The Chairperson voiced his concern over **COM 15** and the shut off/of street lighting, as he feared that the significant potential savings earmarked for future years could be outweighed by risks such as the impact it has on Education, due to routes to schools becoming unsafe if they are not lit.

The Head of Neighbourhood Services advised Members, that of all the savings earmarked in red in Appendix B to the report, this would be one of the hardest to deliver as it was proposed to turn off the majority of street lighting in the County Borough other than in key strategic sites and at junctions. Street lighting was not a statutory provision and also was not considered to be a priority when compared to others that came under the purview of the Communities Directorate in the view of the general public. He added that it would in all probability not be possible to turn off the street lighting in certain school locations, so this was an added issue as to where the allotted savings could be actually achievable.

A Member asked if there was any possibility in dimming or providing LED street lighting as an alternative in certain more dangerous locations.

The Head of Neighbourhood Services advised that the level of savings required would mean the switching off of all street lighting, other than a few designated areas mentioned both above and in the report.

A Member felt that solar lighting though expensive when initially being set-up, would be a saving in the more longer term.

The Head of Neighbourhood Services advised that he would look into this, and that the Council had previously received a grant for LED lighting.

A Member asked if the proposal would mean a total shut off of street lighting without exception.

The Head of Neighbourhood Services replied that this was the intention, other than where risk assessments to be conducted dictated otherwise.. This would have to be implemented in order to achieve the saving which amounted to £500k over a period of two years following the next financial year.

A Member referred to **COM 17** and the proposal to reduce the core budget for the Civil Parking Enforcement Team. As this was a method of taking in income for the Council, he asked why a cut was being proposed in this area.

The Finance Manager, Education, Communities and Education advised that the income that had been received since the introduction of Civil Parking Enforcement Officers had

been significant and higher than had been anticipated. Previously, reserves had been made available to off-set any deficit in income and this amounted to £50k which was the saving proposed for next year, as the number of penalty notices that had been issued meant that this reserve was now no longer deemed necessary to support the service.

A Member referred to **COM 23** and the proposal to reduce the frequency of gully cleansing. He was concerned with this proposal based on the recent experiences of flooding in the Maesteg area.

The Corporate Director – Communities advised that this proposal may be reviewed in light of the recent flooding of homes issue.

In terms of the saving required next year for **COM 24**, for the treatment of domestic food waste (anaerobic digestion), the Head of Neighbourhood Services confirmed that this could now be changed on the traffic light system from amber to green as the savings proposed had now almost be achieved.

A Member referred to **COM 25** and a reduced focus on overgrowth affecting in rear lanes and footpaths in rural areas, and noticed that this team had been significantly reduced once more, yet this service formed only 16% of the Directorates overall budget. He felt that a further reduction in this area would be of detriment to the public and the visual appearance at these locations.

The Corporate Director – Communities confirmed that he would check this cut in percentage to establish if it was an accurate reduction.

A Member referred to **COM 31** and made the point that the budget reduction of 2016-17 ie £195k should in fact be red, as the Council had failed to lease the Raven's Court building in the current year.

The Head of Regeneration, Development and Property Services advised that the marketing of Raven's Court was continuing and that a meeting with a prospective tenant had been arranged in January. There was also interest still being shown by the previous tenant, and it was worth being patient as the building was sizeable and could therefore be used for a profitable business that would attract jobs and inward investment, for example as a car sales company. She added also that the £195k saving for 2016-17 would now transfer to 2017-18 and the savings earmarked for the two subsequent years were in respect of costs to keep running the building if it had still not been leased by these times.

A Member referred to **COM 32** and a proposed review of Lifeguard services to consider length of season and beach coverage and a saving showing amber on the traffic light status amounting to 60K for the next financial year.

The Corporate Director – Communities advised that his Directorate would now need to make this saving, as it had been a service that up until this year had come under the purview of the Social Services and Wellbeing Directorate, but had now transferred over to the Communities Directorate.

The Head of Regeneration, Development and Property Services confirmed that a more holistic approach would be taken in future to continue to provide this service, but it would be reduced compared to that of previous years in view of the budget reduction. It was hoped though to negate this to a degree by having support from other sources and Registered Charities such as the RNLI. She added also that subsidies given to organisations and clubs would also be reduced and/or tapered.

The Chairperson then thanked the Invitees for attending and responding to questions, following which, they retired from the meeting.

Conclusions

Members were concerned at the proposal to eventually close all public conveniences in the Borough by 2018/19 and introduce a comfort scheme as a substitute. Meanwhile Members were concerned that the reductions to the cleaning teams in this area would mean that the service becomes a reactive service and therefore would create a potential public health risk.

Members questioned Officers on the removal of four area cleaner streets teams and asked how the service would operate if the proposal went ahead and what the minimum statutory requirements in the Environmental Protection Act were. Officers stated that the minimum requirements were not defined and it would require a challenge. Officers added that the reduction proposal included the reduction of a vehicle which meant the operational schedule would change and areas would be prioritised as necessary.

Members queried why the car parking review and proposed changes had not yet been completed and implemented despite this being a reduction proposal for 2016-17. Officers stated that the review would happen early in 2017 upon implementation of the residents parking scheme. They added that there had been some legal issues which had contributed to the delay but now these had been resolved they were hoping to complete the review and achieve the proposed savings as soon as possible.

Members questioned the officers on the proposal of the street lighting and whether this was to partially or fully switch off the street lights. Officers stated that risk assessments would be carried out to determine which sites to switch off and that they would be fully turned off in these areas. Members were concerned at the potential risk to community safety, especially of that on learner travel routes.

Members were concerned at the proposal to reduce the frequency to gully cleansing as they feared homes would be at risk due to water and flood risks. Officers shared the Members concerns and stated that this proposal would be reviewed.

Members welcomed a review of the proposal to reduce the frequency of gully cleansing.

Members were concerned at the proposal of reduced focus on rear lanes overgrowth and footpaths in rural areas and that this would require expensive and extensive future repairs.

Members did not agree with the proposed saving of £15k for the reduction of weed spraying as this would end up being more costly in the long run and not an efficient way of operating.

Recommendations

Members recommended the removal of the proposal to switch off the street lighting due to the risk of community safety.

Further Information

Members asked for further information regarding the residents parking scheme to include details of when this would be implemented and what areas of Bridgend County would be included in the scheme.

Members asked for further information regarding the potential use of solar lights throughout the Borough and if the costs into purchasing and installation had been investigated.

Members asked for further information on the reduction in teams in relation to rear lanes overgrowth and footpaths in rural areas. Members specifically asked for number of teams that operate and how they manage the workloads sufficiently.

79. URGENT ITEMS

None

The meeting closed at 4.35 pm