

CORPORATE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - MONDAY, 20 JANUARY 2020

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE CORPORATE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD IN COUNCIL CHAMBER, CIVIC OFFICES ANGEL STREET BRIDGEND CF31 4WB ON MONDAY, 20 JANUARY 2020 AT 09:30

Present

Councillor CA Green – Chairperson

NA Burnett
RL Penhale-
Thomas

N Clarke
RMI Shaw

T Giffard
JC Spanswick

M Jones
T Thomas

Apologies for Absence

JPD Blundell, J Gebbie and KL Rowlands

Officers:

Michael Pitman
Tracy Watson

Democratic Services Officer - Committees
Scrutiny Officer

Invitees:

Councillor Huw David
Gill Lewis

Martin Morgans

Mark Shephard

Leader
Interim Head of Finance and Section 151
Officer
Head of Performance and Partnership
Services
Chief Executive

148. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None

149. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the 25/09/2019 be approved as a true and accurate record and the minutes of the 07/11/2019 be approved subject to removal of sentence at agenda item 3, paragraph 9 “The Cabinet Member for Future Generations and Wellbeing advised that”.

150. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2020-21 TO 2023-24

The Interim Head of Finance presented a report to the Committee with the draft Medium Term Financial Strategy 2020-21 to 2023-24, which set out the spending priorities of the Council, key investment objectives and budget areas targeted for necessary savings. The strategy included a financial forecast for 2020-2024 and a detailed draft revenue budget for 2020-21.

She provided the Corporate Plan-Policy Context and Budget Narrative as detailed in section 3 of the report.

The Interim Head of Finance provided the Corporate Financial Overview which showed that the last 10 years, the Council has made £68 million of budget reductions. The graph and 3.3.2 of the report gives a visual representation of reductions year by year.

The Interim Head of Finance explained that the settlement was better than expected with it being at 4.7%, an increase of £8.878 million. She advised, however, that this would be hit by the teachers' pay award.

The Interim Head of Finance provided details the current year (2019-20) Financial Performance. Table 1 of the report provided the comparison of budget against projected outturn at 30 September 2019.

She advised that the overall projected position at 30 September 2019 was a net underspend of £575,000, comprising £659,000 net overspend on directorates and £4.808 million underspend on corporate budgets, offset by net appropriation to earmarked reserves of £3.574 million.

The Interim Head of Finance explained that Table 2 of the report showed the MTFS proposals supported by MTFS Budget Reduction Contingency Reserve in 2019-20. The level of this review would be kept under review by the Section 151 officer in light of forecast difficulties in delivering specific future budget reduction proposals.

The Interim Head of Finance explained that Table 3 of the report showed the MTFS Scenarios percentage change in AEF. Table 4 showed the Councils potential net budget reduction requirement based on the forecast resource envelope, inescapable spending assumptions and assumed Council Tax increases.

The Interim Head of Finance explained that Table 5 of the report outlined the current position in respect of addressing the most likely forecast budget reduction requirement of £39.332 million. She advised that the Council still needed to develop proposals to the value of £21.1 million and a range of options were under consideration including:

- Digital transformation of wider Council services
- Income generation opportunities
- Further reductions in employee numbers
- Working with partners to asset transfer and protect community facilities
- Further implementation of the Corporate Landlord Model.

The Interim Head of Finance explained that Table 6 showed the budget reduction proposals and their categorisation, with almost two thirds of the proposed savings coming from Smarter Use of Resources. Table 8 showed the Draft Revenue Budget 2020-21 and the breakdown of Service directorate budgets.

The Interim Head of Finance explained the details on Pay, Prices and Demographics. She stated that the National Joint Council (NJC) negotiating body had submitted a pay claim for non-teaching staff for 2020-21 and discussions were ongoing. She advised that depending on the outcome of the negotiations, there could be additional budget pressures that the Council had to meet. She added that any additional teachers pay award to be implemented from September 2020 would provide additional pressures. Further details of budget pressures were listed at section 4 of the report.

The Chairperson thanked the Interim Head of Finance for the report and said that the settlement being better than expected was a sigh of relief.

A Member stated that there were cuts in all areas other than schools. Members of the public had shown interest in protecting sports pitches so why were there cuts here and not in schools. The Leader responded stating that schools had already taken big cuts in the past with teachers and managers being made redundant which has had an impact

on education outcomes in some schools. He stated that the public consultations always outlined the public's view that they wish to protect schools and social services.

A Member stated that she felt schools were a very important area to protect as education is important in helping children be the best they can be. She was concerned that the local authority was not ensuring that all schools were equipped to manage their budgets appropriately due to the numerous deficits.

A Member stated that trade unions have indicated a possible 10% pay rise and asked how the negotiations are going. The Leader said that they are still ongoing as it was on a national level rather than a local level. He said that any pay award would need to be fully funded to ensure that it did not come at a cost in services or jobs.

The Interim Head of Finance explained that the timetable for the pay award had been prolonged and that it will likely be later into the year before we receive confirmation on it. She added that a 2% increase was deemed likely and the amount necessary to cover this was set aside.

A Member stated that on page 7 of the report it outlines that in the public consultation, the lowest level of council tax increase was 2% higher than what was actually chosen and asked for clarification on why this was the case.

The Interim Head of Finance stated that the reason the rise was lower than the options given in the consultation was solely because of the settlement received being higher than expected. The Consultation ended before we received the settlement and the figures were based on what we expected to get, not what we actually had.

The Chairperson suggested that a disclaimer be placed at the bottom of the tables stating that the figures were subject to change if the settlement changes.

A Member explained that the relationship with Town and Community Councils needed improvement and the Community Asset Transfer (CAT) was crucial. He believed that the CAT officer was hard working but was not getting the support he needed.

The Chief Executive stated that it had been recognised that CAT process needed more work and was working on a business case to present to CMB. He agreed that more work is needed between Town and Community Councils too and that the Town and Community Council Forum was in need of a review so that official outcomes can come from it.

A Member stated that locally, police officers do not see it as a priority to protect buildings and that we need to reinforce our relationship with South Wales Police and ensure that there was enough citizen and community focus.

The Chief Executive stated that South Wales Police would be invited to Council so that Members would be able to ask them questions and raise concerns.

A Member asked for clarification on the proposed cuts to Member training. The Cabinet Member for Wellbeing and Future Generations explained that Member training was never used to its full potential and that the cuts in that budget bring it down to the level that it was currently being used at.

A Member asked what affect would the proposal at CEX1 – may require restructure - have on the Shared Regulatory Service. The Cabinet Member for Wellbeing and Future Generations explained that this was due to the difficulty in recruiting into the SRS. This was a one time reduction and would not form part of the savings next year.

RESOLVED: That the Committee:

1. Considered the information contained in the report and attached appendices
2. Made comments and recommendations for consolidation and inclusion in their report to Cabinet as detailed below:

“The committee welcomes the improved budget settlement, which has been directed to where it is favourable.”

“In relation to the consultation ‘Shaping Bridgend’s Future’, Members suggested that future Budget Consultation’s should include a caveat at the bottom stating that ‘should the settlement be more generous, this could be subject to change’ or similar.”

151. INCIDENT AND NEAR MISS REPORTING PROCEDURE

The Interim Head of Finance presented a report which provided the Committee with the incidents and near missed that were reported to the Insurance and Risk Officer in the 2019 calendar year for consideration.

She provided background and what the definition was considered for an Incident and a Near Miss as listed in section 3 of the report.

She advised that the reporting procedure was introduced following a report to the Audit Committee on the 17th January 2019, a copy of the policy was attached at Appendix A of the report.

The Interim Head of Finance advised that since January 2019, three ‘incidents and near miss’ happenings had been reported, two of which were considered ‘green’ and one of which was considered ‘amber’. Appendix B provided details of these incidents.

She advised that the incident and near miss procedure was publicised in a Bridgend’s email earlier in the year with a hyperlink to the procedure. It was presumed that Senior Management Team would disseminate the information in manager meetings to reinforce the new procedure, however the number of incidences reported may not be accurate reflection of the actual incidences and that not all managers were aware of the procedure.

She added that there were more being risks and near misses reported but the process was not followed in order to get the relevant information to the insurance officer.

A Member raised their concerns over human error with regards to incidences. If something was serious enough, many people may not want to report this as they know there could be consequences. The Interim Head of Finance explained that it was hoped the procedure can form as lessons to be learned, rather than blaming individuals.

A Member asked how quickly action was taken once the form was filled in. The Chief Executive stated that action was normally taken quickly but emphasised that it was more about learning from mistakes and not repeating the issues in the future.

A Member stated that more work may be needed on our Community Safety Partnerships and ensuring that the outside bodies like SWP are taking more ownership of situations and putting their own preventative measures in place.

RESOLVED: That the Committee has considered the report of incidents and near misses at Appendix B, and is satisfied with the action to prevent reoccurrence

Members wished to make the following comments and conclusions:

The committee note that an annual report will be presented to the Committee for consideration.

Members suggested that a case study be provided to illustrate how the process has worked e.g. from form completion to direction of travel.

Members sought reassurance the procedures would be followed robustly, but not in a prejudicial way.

152. **COUNCIL PERFORMANCE AGAINST ITS COMMITMENTS AT QUARTER 2 OF 2019-20 (INFORMATION REPORT)**

The Chief Executive presented a report which provided an overview of the Councils Performance in 2019-20 as of quarter two.

He advised that data collected for the half year returns suggested that the Council was on track to deliver 38 (93%) of its commitments to its three well-being objectives (green) with the other 3 (7%) missing some of their milestones (amber).

A Member asked in relation to the first indicator on page 95, the number of working days per full time equivalent lost due to sickness absence was 11.79. Has anything been put in place to tackle this.

The Chief Executive stated that an improvement target was now in place and a number of interventions were also in place to address the issues such as stress and anxiety. He advised that mindfulness courses had been put in place in recent months as well as advertising the access to counselling and was comfortable that enough had been put in place to see how well it did. He added that the emphasis needed to be put on the staff and ensure they were supported and keeping them in work rather than waiting for staff to go off work sick.

A Member asked if flu jabs were offered to staff members. The Chief Executed stated that flu jabs were only currently offered to certain frontline teams like social services etc.

A Member stated that fly tipping has increased and we had missed the target. He believed that the service needed to be looked at as it was not performing well. The Chairperson added that the trend had decreased from the same quarter last year, but the concerns were still there as the authority was 21/22 for cleanliness of highways.

A Member commented on the number of empty commercial properties in Bridgend with a number of them being in poor condition. He asked if we were able to compare with other authorities. The Chairperson explained that the much of this may had been down to shopping trends, i.e. with online shopping becoming increasing popular. She stated that landlords had not reduced their rates as a result, but that may change due to them being forced to pay business rates.

RESOLVED: That the Committee noted the half year corporate performance.

Members wished to make the following comments and conclusions:

In respect of DRE6.6.4i Percentage of employees completing e-learning modules, Members queried why the Annual Target had been reduced from 45% in 18/19 to 25% in 19/20, given that this target includes Mandatory-e-learning requirements?

In respect of DC01.1.3ii, DC01.1.3iii, DC01.1.3iv, Members suggested that more comment is required here, suggesting providing comparables with other towns, in order to compare like for like.

In respect of PAM / 035, Members queried the Qtr2 Actual Figure, 2.67 days, given that the narrative states 'This is a good performance and shows a responsive service'.

Members queried whether the amount of fly tipping (PAM/035), was impacting on our cleanliness target (PAM/010).

Members raised concern in respect of the Disabled Facilities Grants (PAM/015, PSR009a & PSR009b), given the average number of calendar days taken to deliver a grant.

153. CORPORATE PARENTING CHAMPION NOMINATION REPORT

The Committee was requested to nominate a replacement Member to Councillor C Webster as its Corporate Parenting Champion to represent the Committee as an Invitee to meetings of the Corporate Parenting Cabinet Committee. Members elected Councillor Nicole Burnett.

A Member queried the responsibility of the Corporate Parent role as a result of a court case in Cardiff where the Ombudsman determined that Councillors did not have a Corporate Parenting responsibility. The Member asked if clarification could be given on this as the information had been contradictory.

RESOLVED: That the Committee nominated Councillor Nicole Burnett as the Corporate Parenting Champion to represent the Committee as an invitee on the Cabinet Committee Corporate Parenting.

154. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE

The Scrutiny Officer presented an update on the Forward Work Programme for the Committee to consider items scheduled to be held on 24 January and 13 February 2020 and seek confirmation of the information required for the subsequent meeting, scheduled to be held on 23 March 2020.

The Scrutiny Officer advised that the item on Tynyrheol Primary School was due to be presented on the 9th March, however the school was now out of special measures and was no longer required to come to Committee. She advised that the item on Learner Travel had now taken priority.

The Scrutiny Officer advised that Plastic Free Bridgend had now moved to Subject Overview and Scrutiny Committee 3 on the 18th March. A Member asked if the Cleaner Streets Operations Officer could be asked to attend the meeting.

RESOLVED: That the Committee:

1. Identified additional information they wished to receive in relation to the scheduled items for 13 February 2020 including invitees they wished to attend within Appendix A
2. Confirmed the items prioritised and delegated to the Subject Overview and Scrutiny Committees contained within Appendix B.

155. URGENT ITEMS

None.

The meeting closed at 12:30