

COMMUNITY & ADULT SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

18 FEBRUARY 2019

Present: Councillor McGarry(Chairperson)
Councillors Ahmed, Carter, Ebrahim, Goddard, Jenkins and
Molik

60 : APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Lent.

61 : DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None received.

62 : DRAFT CORPORATE PLAN 2019-2022 & DRAFT BUDGETARY
PROPOSALS 2019/20

The Chairperson advised Members that this item provided them with an opportunity to consider those items contained in the draft Corporate Plan and draft Budgetary Proposals which fall within the responsibility of the Committee. These would be considered by Cabinet on Thursday 21st February, prior to being considered by Council on 28th February.

The meeting provided Members with an opportunity to consider the Draft Corporate Plan and the Budget proposals. The report provided an outline of the draft budget and the commitments included in the Corporate Plan which fall within the responsibility of the Committee. The Chairperson advised that she would refer Members to the relevant paragraphs of the cover report when necessary.

Members would firstly receive a briefing on the Corporate Overview of the draft budget proposals.

The budget proposals and relevant parts of the Corporate Plan would then be considered in three parts, namely; Housing & Communities Directorate relevant to Councillor Thorne's Portfolio, Housing & Communities Directorate relevant to Councillor Elsmore's Portfolio and Adult Social Services Directorate.

Corporate Overview

The Chairperson welcomed Councillor Chris Weaver, Cabinet Member for Finance, Modernisation and Performance; Christine Salter, Corporate Director, Resources; and Allan Evans, Operational Manager Accountancy in Resources.

The Chairperson invited the Cabinet Member to make a statement in which he said that there was a budget gap of £32.4 million, which would be closed by a Council Tax rise of 4.9% and £19 million of directorate savings, most of which were the proposals that went to consultation in the Autumn. He was happy to say that the Financial Resilience Model was being taken forward almost in full apart from £200k and that the budget had been proposed with consideration being given to Capital Ambition, relevant legislation and the Future Generations and Wellbeing Act. It was stressed

however that over the past decade the Council has had to find £200 million of savings and a further 105 million would need to be found over the next 4 years.

Members were provided with a presentation on the Cabinet Budget Proposal by Christine Salter after which, the Chairperson invited questions and comments from Members.

Members asked whether the Council Tax increase proposed was affordable to residents. Officers explained that the proposed increase was a technical assumption to achieve a balanced budget; there were only a number of things that could be done to achieve this, an increase in council tax, directorate savings and the use of reserves. The Cabinet Member stated that the assumption over the next 4 years was unlikely to be 4.9% each year. It was added that some people will get a pay award to cover this increase but noted that others would not. It was stressed that services needed to be protected and it was a real challenge. An indicative budget is set in the summer, the Council debates this then and again in February when the budget is set.

Members asked in relation to the Red/Amber and Red RAG status savings proposals, whether there is any specific rigour and testing undertaken throughout the year to ensure that these savings can be achieved or whether any are written off in advance if they are deemed unachievable. The Cabinet Member stated that none are written off, they expect the savings to be made; this year they have retrospectively written off one sum of £53k which was in relation to the Consortium. The savings proposed should be achievable, there is a £3 million contingency fund in the budget so that provides a degree of comfort from a corporate perspective. The focus would remain on the Red and Red/Amber proposals; the risks are known and often they rely on external factors to enable them to move along the planning stage. It was added that if services need to be transforming and reshaping then there would always be an element of risk.

Members noted the level of savings proposed for the directorate and noted that Social Services historically had not made the savings they had proposed; Members asked if these proposals were in fact achievable at 36% of total savings proposed. The Cabinet Member explained that although 36% seems a large amount, Social Services have the largest budget so in context they have less to save than other service areas. The savings would be a challenge with a degree of risk as the service is people led; Overall Social Services is getting an increased budget; Adult Services has demonstrated good budget performance this year so confidence is as good as it can be. Officers added that they monitor budgets monthly including savings, this was important for financial resilience reasons, and the Chief Executive had made it very clear that he expects the savings to be achieved.

Members noted the year on year increase in Council Tax and asked if it was time to look at more creative and innovative ways to address the medium and long term financial position. The Cabinet Member did not agree as he considered that the Council had responded remarkably to the challenge in budgets over recent years with very ambitious thinking in services such as leisure and libraries; there would now be a focus on waste as services need improving but he was confident this could be achieved. He added that the Council has proved that it can deliver significant transformational change; Council tax rises only go a fraction of the way to close the

budget gap the rest takes a lot of creativity from service areas to achieve these savings, to not raise Council Tax would be unrealistic.

Members were concerned about 'More Children Supported in Cardiff' if there are not enough homes to support them. The Cabinet Member stated that the decision to bring children back to Cardiff would always be based on the needs of the child; alongside this there were plans to create more homes and there were plans to strengthen the fostering position in Cardiff too.

Members noted the £3 million grant for social services and were advised by Officers that the grant was specific and was £30 million across Wales, Cardiff had received £3 million but social services growth was well in excess of that amount.

Housing & Communities Directorate – Councillor Thorne's Portfolio

The Chairperson welcomed Councillor Lynda Thorne, Cabinet Member for Housing & Communities; and Jane Thomas Assistant Director, Housing & Communities.

The Chairperson invited Councillor Thorne to make a statement in which she said that she was pleased to introduce the presentation on the Corporate Plan and Budget savings for Housing & Communities, adding that it was notable to see Rough sleeping addressed within the Corporate Plan, and that it is not just a housing issue and a multiagency response was currently being progressed. The further roll out of Hubs with the development of Community Wellbeing hubs, was allowing the council to provide improved locality services, according to the needs of the area, while creating financial savings through the co-location of services.

Members were provided with a presentation after which the Chairperson invited questions and comments;

Members noted in relation to the HRA that there was significant investment in housing and asked if there was confidence that the 2.4% rent increase would cover that investment and asked how this budget would impact the debt in HRA bearing in mind the previous discussion around unpaid rent due to the transfer to Universal Credit. Officers explained that they would be able to cope with the CPF for one year but over 30 years it would bring significant challenges; Cardiff had expected CPF+1, this issue would be brought to a future scrutiny committee for further discussion. Officers added that they were waiting to see what the Welsh Government review of rent policy would bring; HRA operatives would need to find efficiencies that they haven't had to find in the past. The Cabinet Member stated that Cardiff would be making representations to Welsh Government about lifting the cap as Cardiff had hoped to increase the target.

Members welcomed the new expenditure for older person's accommodation and asked if there were any new lines linked to extra care accommodation. Officers advised that this was included in the £27 million and that there would also be some contributions from partners.

Members were concerned that as there were already Council Tax arrears that the proposed increase in the Council Tax rate would only exacerbate this. Officers explained that the assumption would be tested regularly over the next 4 years. With regards to arrears, Cardiff collects a large amount of these and officers were not

aware of any increase in arrears. Officers stressed the importance of support and advice to people who are struggling and this would continue to be offered; Council Tax collection rate is still holding up well. The Cabinet Member added that there is a huge amount of support offered via the hubs and recently the hubs have been successful in obtaining over £11 million in benefits for citizens; it was noted that better communication was needed as some people believed that hub advice and support was only for unemployed people which was not the case.

Members sought assurance that the rent levels being capped would not affect the quality of the council houses being built; the Cabinet Member assured Members that the quality of the homes was superb and would remain so.

Members were pleased to see further funding being added into Homelessness and Rough Sleeping and asked if the funding would support people out of homelessness or be used to bring enforcement action against rough sleepers in tents in the City Centre. Officers assured Members that the funding was entirely for supporting people out of homelessness, providing the right level of support tailored to individual need. The Cabinet Member stressed that they do not take enforcement action, Highways were serving notices on tents that were causing obstruction, and the tents wouldn't be removed until the people have somewhere to go, Outreach workers were on the street explaining this process to people. Members considered it important that rough sleepers are not treated as criminals, but that they feel safe in being able to access services.

Members asked if Cardiff had received any additional support from Welsh Government to address the increase in rough sleeping. Officers advised that they have had some additional funding but it is limited and Cardiff has to bid for it, unfortunately the money often comes later in the financial year. Officers added that Welsh Government has invested in the Housing First scheme and there will be two schemes operating soon, a new Council scheme alongside the Salvation Army scheme.

In relation to Housing First, Members were concerned as the private rented sector is decreasing. Officers explained that the new scheme would be building on the Salvation Army scheme with private rented sector housing as these are in different locations to council housing stock, it was difficult but the private rented properties are out there and this pilot would test that; a report would be brought back to a future committee on this.

Housing & Communities Directorate – Councillor Elsmore's Portfolio

The Chairperson welcomed Councillor Susan Elsmore, Cabinet Member for Social Care, Health & Wellbeing and Jane Thomas Assistant Director, Housing & Communities.

The Chairperson invited Councillor Elsmore to make a statement in which she said that she was pleased to see further work underway to empower and enable people to remain at home for longer; there was a new way of delivering domiciliary care in line with the older persons housing strategy, to deliver services as effectively and efficiently as possible. There was also work underway in relation to addressing social isolation through various schemes including intergenerational work.

Members were provided with a presentation after which the Chairperson invited questions and comments;

Members were concerned that the savings would mean an impact on services but Officers assured Members that the savings were more realignment of back office services.

Members referred to the Enable grant and asked if this would be replaced if it stopped. Officers were not aware that it was ending at any time soon. Officers added that most of the ILS was funded by grants.

Members were pleased to see that the first point of contact would be based in Hospitals and the positive effect this would have on Dtocs.

Social Services (Adult Services) Directorate

The Chairperson welcomed Councillor Susan Elsmore, Cabinet Member for Social Care, Health & Wellbeing, Claire Marchant, Director of Social Services and Louise Barry, Assistant Director Adult Services.

The Chairperson invited Councillor Elsmore to make a statement in which she said that this was her fifth year coming to this committee. There is a challenging agenda with pressures all the time, increased need, increased complexity, rising costs of provision for various reasons including the National Minimum Wage. There was a challenge of sustainability in the care market however Cardiff is innovative, creative and has a quality of partnerships that helps meet the complexity of demands it faces.

Members were provided with a presentation after which the Chairperson invited questions and comments;

Members referred to the BME community and mental health and how often people rely on friends to support them for appointment etc. and asked if this was picked up. Officers understood the importance of addressing this and considered that moving to a locality approach would help this. Members discussed the importance of the BME workforce and Officers noted the work that was ongoing to promote care in the community as a career. The Cabinet Member added that mapping the gaps was important too, a city wide offer was great but it also needs to be flexible enough to be bespoke to serve all communities across the city.

Members noted the Red and Red/Amber savings in relation to Learning Disabilities and were concerned that there may be an impact on services for vulnerable people. Officers advised that it was the way in which the savings are made that was important, a strength based approach was needed; they understood the concerns around mental health, there is a change in approach from institutional to community based with support, investment was needed in these community services and a disinvestment in the institutional services; this was already being done and savings were being made. The same approach was taken with Learning Disabilities, it was about a strength based approach, looking at what matters to individuals and reflecting this in the support that is offered. The Cabinet Member stated that there was now a financial grip and she was assured by the underspend in Adult Services.

Members asked if there was a move towards more of call centre approach for services and pulling services on the ground. The Cabinet Member stated that this was what she was hearing from service users, it was about providing the most appropriate service based on individual need; it was a whole system approach including prevention, enablement etc. and not automatically entering people into the social care system.

Members noted the complexities of Learning Disabilities and were concerned that if needs were not able to be met in the community then the savings would not be realised. Officers stated that they work with individuals, some need more support than others but overall they can provide more cost effective care by this way of working however underneath this there needed to be arrangements in place to support others.

The Cabinet Member wished to thank Christine Salter for the considerable contribution that she has made to Scrutiny over the years.

AGREED: that the Chairperson, on behalf of the Committee, writes to the Cabinet Member conveying the observations of the Committee when discussing the way forward.

63 : URGENT ITEMS (IF ANY)

None received.

64 : WAY FORWARD

Members discussed the information received and identified a number of issues which the Chairperson agreed would be included in the letters that would be sent, on behalf of the Committee, to the relevant Cabinet Members and Officers.

65 : DATE OF NEXT MEETING

6 March 2019 at 4:30pm, Committee Room 4, County Hall

The meeting terminated at 7.10 pm