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CORRESPONDENCE FOLLOWING THE COMMITTEE MEETING

Committee COMMUNITY & ADULT SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date and Time of Meeting MONDAY, 26 FEBRUARY 2024, 10.00 AM

Please find below correspondence send by the Committee Chair following the meeting, together with any responses received.

For any further details, please contact scrutinyviewpoints@cardiff.gov.uk

8 **Correspondence following committee meeting** (Pages 3 - 8)

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Date: 28 Feb 2024

Cllr Chris Weaver

Cabinet Member for Finance, Modernisation and Performance.

Correspondence Sent via e-mail.



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Dear Cllr Weaver,

CASSC Scrutiny Committee 26 Feb 2024: Draft Corporate Plan 2024-2027 and Draft Budgetary Proposals 2024-2025

Our sincere thanks, to you, your Cabinet colleagues and officers, for attending Committee on 26 Feb 2024. Understanding and testing the decision making within the Council's proposed budget, and its Corporate Plan, is of vital importance. As such, the opportunity this meeting provides; to allow Committee Members, and members of the public, to examine or hear the rationale for the decision making, is welcomed; and we thank all attendees for facilitating this and attending our meeting.

Corporate Overview

Due to the ongoing cost of living crisis, we tested how the managing of the council's budget, particularly the aspects which have direct implications for residents (*such as council tax rises and increase in fees and charges*) is offset against demand on services, service sustainability and the council's future outlook. From the response, we heard managing this matter requires a constant, iterative discussion to ensure the decisions made on revenue raising from fees and charges are reasonable and are made with the current financial context in mind.

Due to the significant and sustained pressure on services within this committee's remit, it was interesting to explore the decision-making process regarding the use of reserves; for example how it is determined how much reserve is required to draw down, and how much reserve residual is deemed sufficient to ensure sustainability and lessen risk in future years.

From the discussion, we note the use of reserve is done in tandem with the service area, alongside continuous risk assessment and monitoring. Further, we also note officers' assurance later in the meeting, that when grant funding is achieved; this is often used to reimburse reserves.

We questioned the rationale for the £0.5m reduction in Adult Services' contingency budget, however we do recognise that within these budget proposals, Adult Services has seen an overall growth of around £15m which is welcomed.

Regarding the employee implications for the overall 2024-2025 budget proposals, we note that 62 posts are currently marked as '*TBC / Redeployment*' and we were informed the reasoning for the uncertainty is largely in part to many of the post being agency. Owing to the importance of employee implications, we would welcome in future years that employee implication be known prior to determining or proposing budget proposals.

Lastly, we welcome the increased level of response to this year's budget's consultation, and we hope this increased level of engagement between the council and residents continues on a positive trajectory.

Cllr Sangani – Cabinet Member for Public Health & Equalities

As Cllr Sangani will be aware, we as a committee have been briefed by council officers, and third sector organisations, of the significant capacity issues and growing demand, facing the asylum seeker and refugee services the council manages. We are very aware that these services 'could soon reach breaking point.' Taking this into account, it was relatively disappointing there appears to be no additional steps being taken to address this issue in both the financial and Corporate Plan proposals before us.

Although we note and concur with Cllr Sangani and officers on the importance of external funding and partnership work (both inside and outside the Council) to address this issue, we are disappointed that more prominence or commitment to addressing this issue has not been included in the proposals, particularly in terms of assigning staff resource. In addition, we also have specific concerns around the reliance on grant/external funding in terms of sustainability in future years.

Cllr Peter Bradbury – Tackling Poverty and Supporting Young People

We welcome the revision of the Advice Service targets (KPI 3.09 & 3.10) in the Corporate Plan as this increase of targets is something we have been requesting for some time. However, we were initially disheartened to see that despite past assurances on the importance of the Advice Services, and the administration's desire to protect the team wherever possible, a saving proposal for the loss of two posts within the Advice Services team had been put forward. Further, we also questioned how targets could be raised if resource within the team is diminished and the subsequent implications and pressures this could place on remaining staff.

From the discussion, we are aware, the posts within the saving proposal (*Ref: HACE11*) have been vacant from some time, and the proposed use of money within the Earmarked Reserves (*Ref: Line 67, General Reserves & Line 3, HRA reserves*) will be used to provide additional staff. Further, we have noted Cllr Bradbury's comments that we are currently in the second year of Shared Prosperity Funding, and the next (third year) of funding may present significant challenges for Cllr Bradbury's portfolio; and services within it. We look forward to working with the administration in navigating this in future years.

Cllr Norma Mackie – Cabinet Member for Adult Service

When considering the overall achievability of the savings proposed for Adult Services, we noted all the service change proposals hold a degree of amber risk categorisation in terms of its achievability and residual.

For this reason, we sought insight on the proposals deliverability and were subsequently informed; the reasoning for the amber/green or amber/red categorisation is largely attributed to timescales owing to proposals largely relating to recommissioning of services.

Given the majority of the service change proposals for Adult Services are interlinked with the care an individual receives (*whether it be the costing or model of care provided*) we do wish to stress the importance of 'personalised care'.

Through our work with yourself and officers, and from the response we received at the meeting, we know the importance of personalised care is shared by the Cabinet

Member and service area. The discussion reassured us that care provision will only be offered to individuals where it best aligns with their needs and wishes.

We also wish to reiterate the importance of all proposals being carefully and slowly phased in, especially as it appears the proposals comprise a longer-term programme of change.

Remaining mindful of the sustained pressures within the council's Community Resource Team since the outbreak of the pandemic, and the ongoing efforts and initiatives being deployed to assist the team (*e.g., return to the teams reablement focus, new rostering et al*) we were disappointed to see their savings proposal (*Ref: ADUSC4*).

When exploring the rationale for this budget proposal, we were informed the savings relates to a reduction in back office / admin related service and is being proposed as part of the teams ongoing reform and is not offered specifically to help the council bridge its budget gap.

We welcome progression of the council's neuro-divergent commitments yet sought clarity on how they will be achieved given it received no financial contribution within this budget proposal. From the subsequent discussion, we heard it is the intention for this work to be progressed by drawing upon current resource within the council, its partners and through grant funding.

We note, the work is currently in a scoping phase, and we look forward to monitoring its progression.

Cllr Thorne – Housing & Communities

Given the significant, and ongoing housing situation we questioned if the revenue budget proposed for the service area is sufficient to address the sustained pressures placed on services and the range of commitments detailed in the Corporate Plan.

We note from the discussion, it is recognised the situation is challenging, however there is confidence it will meet the need; particularly as the service area will continue to apply for a range of grants.

We are aware of the forthcoming Welsh Housing Quality Standards and the significant financial and resource challenges this will generate. For this reason, we explored why no money had been set aside with the budget proposals for this issue and we heard although money is being put aside, challenges remain as the exact cost required for this work is not yet known.

We are aware and share the concerns of Cllr Thorne regarding the significant finance and resource this work will require. We therefore welcome the commitment that the forthcoming years there will be a concentrated effort on understanding how much this WHQS requirement will cost, and how will it be achieved. Further, we note and concur with Cllr Thorne that owing to the significant work required, clear direction and support must be offered by the Welsh Government.

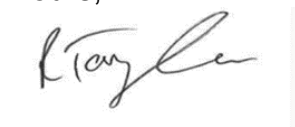
Regarding volunteers, we commend and support the skills and opportunity volunteering provides individuals. However, given this year, and the previous year saw budget proposals to increase the use of volunteers in Hubs we are concerned about the unintended consequence and pressure this could place on paid staff. We note this concern is shared by officers and Cllr Thorne and we welcome the assurance that this will be closely monitored to ensure the proposal has no adverse impact for staff.

Lastly, in line with this Committee's performance monitoring work, we welcome the increased capital allocation for council house repairs, and the introduction of specific steps and KPI's on Council House repairs within the draft Corporate Plan.

On behalf of the Committee, thank you once again to you, your Cabinet colleagues and officers for attending Committee to facilitate our consideration of the proposals.

A response to this letter is not requested.

Yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R Taylor', is enclosed within a thin black rectangular border.

COUNCILLOR RHYS TAYLOR

Chair - Community & Adult Services Scrutiny Committee

cc Members of the Community & Adult Services Scrutiny Committee
Cllr Julie Sangani, Cabinet Member, Public Health & Equalities
Cllr Norma Mackie, Cabinet Member, Adult Services
Cllr Peter Bradbury, Cabinet Member, Tackling Poverty & Supporting Young People
Cllr Lynda Thorne, Cabinet Member, Housing & Communities
Cllr Joel Williams, Chair – Policy, Review & Performance Scrutiny Committee
Chris Lee, Corporate Director, Resource
Rita Rohman, PA/Secretary to Corporate Director, Resource
Ian Allwood, Head of Finance
Sarah McGill, Corporate Director, People & Communities
Jane Thomas, Director, Adults, Housing & Communities
Helen Evans, Assistant Director, Housing & Communities
Gareth Newell, Head of Performance & Partnerships
Dylan Owen, OM Policy & Improvement
Group Leaders
Cabinet Office
Chris Pyke, OM Governance & Audit
Tim Gordon, Head of Communications & External Relations