

COMMUNITY & ADULT SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

22 FEBRUARY 2021

Present: Councillor Jenkins(Chairperson)
Councillors Ahmed, Gibson, Philippa Hill-John, Lent, Lister and McGarry

1 : APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies had been received from Councillor Carter.

2 : DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Mackie declared a personal interest as a trustee of Grassroots and her Sister is Head of Integrated Children's services.

3 : DRAFT CORPORATE PLAN 2021-2024 & DRAFT BUDGETARY PROPOSALS 2021/22

The Chairperson advised that this item provided Members with an opportunity to consider items contained in the draft Corporate Plan and draft Budget Proposals which fall within the remit of this Committee.

The proposals are due to be considered by Cabinet on Thursday 25th February, prior to being considered by Council on the 4th of March.

The meeting would begin with Members receiving a Corporate Overview of the budget. The budget proposals and parts of the Corporate Plan relevant to this committee would then be considered in two parts. The first being the Adults, Housing & Communities areas relevant to Councillor Elsmore's Portfolio, and then the Housing & Communities areas relevant to Councillor Thorne's Portfolio.

Members were provided with presentations on each section after which the Chairperson invited questions and comments, summarised below;

Corporate Overview

The Chairperson welcomed Councillor Chris Weaver, Cabinet Member for Finance, Modernisation and Performance; Chris Lee, Corporate Director, Resources; and Ian Allwood, Head of Finance for this item.

Members asked if efficiency savings for Social Services and Housing and Communities were met last year. Officers advised that the progress on this was included in the quarterly monitoring report; some would have been delayed due to the pandemic. Details could be provided to Members after the meeting. Members considered the savings for this year seem modest. The Cabinet Member explained there were some service changes, also a better than expected settlement from the Welsh Government, however this year may seem more straight forward as they come after ten years of bigger scale savings; this year they were more back office and efficiency based, with lots of work being done on changing the way we work and identifying more income we can rely on.

Members asked if the Council could be challenged on how representative the consultation was as there were low numbers in some categories. The Cabinet Member wished to thank the Officers who worked over Christmas on this. He considered this was a fair question and it was an ongoing challenge to reach all parts of the City; he added they were looking to address this further, this year it had all been online and in a shorter period of time; going forward where they see lower response rates they can target these areas; going back to previous timescales would help in addressing this.

Members referred to the Financial Resilience Model (FRM) and asked if it was a case of the more it is spent the higher the council tax increase. Members also asked if the FRM had ever been used as a general fund for overspent directorates. The Cabinet Member explained that there is a line in the base budget for 'worse case settlement'. If the settlement is better, they keep in the base budget for next year but it can be spent on one-off projects in year. It provides some cushion and makes the council more resilient. When it was introduced it was £4 million, it has always been spent on one-off, one-year projects.

Members asked for an update on claims from the Welsh Government hardship fund. Officers explained that the bulk had already been received, if there was any risk it would be in the January to March quarter however over 95% of the claims had been successful.

Adults, Housing & Communities

The Chairperson welcomed Councillor Susan Elsmore, Cabinet Member for Social Care, Health & Wellbeing, Sarah McGill, Corporate Director People & Communities and Jane Thomas, Director for Adults, Housing & Communities for this item.

Members referred to the work to prevent hospital admissions in wellbeing objective 2 and asked if there was a potential for adding a KPI to this. Officers said it was something they could look to do in future years, although it is harder to measure prevention.

Members asked if last year's Adult Services efficiency savings achieved. The Cabinet Member referred Members to the section 151 Officers statement saying that there were £2 million of unachieved savings due to the pandemic.

Members welcomed the realistic approach with KPI's and not setting targets that may potentially put individuals at risk.

Members asked why the target was 185 days for Disabled Facilities Grants. Officers explained that it was a complex process, it was made up of lots of types of grants and various projects such as building an extension, installing a stair lift etc. The time is from when the application first comes in, some are quicker and some are longer but Cardiff does compare favourably against the rest of Wales.

Members noted the reference to older people and social isolation in the Corporate Plan but young people were not mentioned. The Cabinet Member explained the focus for this portfolio was older people but young people and social isolation is an

issue and that is why a corporate approach is need, working with schools, community groups, care homes etc.

Members referred to the £300k saving for Internal Supported and asked if service users were affected. Officers advised that this related to 2 properties, one of which was empty and the other is in an agreement with a private provider; it won't affect any staff and the individual will not have to move; staff will be redeployed to other schemes where there are vacancies. Going forward it will be about looking at bespoke provision for people and the Council will always endeavour to provide the best opportunities as close to home as possible.

Members noted the Adult Services Strategy and asked if it was cyclical or developed because of the senior management changes in the directorate. Officers explained it was always the intention to have the strategy; it is not an annual strategy but it was a gap that was identified.

Members referred to the Inclusive Cities Project and asked if it had been to Committee. Members were advised it had not and it was an EU funded project across Europe. Members asked for a briefing on this project at a future committee.

In relation to digital inclusion, Members asked if there was a risk that people who are digitally excluded become more so and whether Officers were confident they have the resources needed going forward. Officers explained they are doing lots already, often grant funding was available and staff are good at picking up on this, currently they were confident with the level of resources. The Cabinet Member explained it was about people who come to the Council's attention; partners can also inform the Council and more can be done over time to ensure a greater reach.

Housing & Communities

The Chairperson welcomed Councillor Lynda Thorne, Cabinet Member for Housing & Communities; Sarah McGill, Corporate Director People & Communities and Jane Thomas, Director for Adults, Housing & Communities for this item.

Members noted the target of 2000 new Council homes, the first 1000 by December 2022 and asked of this was the first sign of a delay in the project as the initial target had previously been May 2022. The Cabinet Member agreed that it was, saying the issue was with the developers having issues managing the sites during the pandemic.

Members referred to the target relating to violence and organised crime, saying they were impressed and pleased to read the preventative element. Members noted that people were concerned about organised crime and drugs in the community and asked if there was scope to have KPI's or an extended budget due the level of concern. The Cabinet Member made reference to the partnership approach and the programme and board that has been set up. Officers added that the objective is very clear and it needs to be delivered through multi-disciplinary teams and using local intelligence. Due to the integrated approach it would be difficult to pick out the Council work for KPI purposes.

Members discussed living rent levels and officers advised that these were different for different types of properties and a full report could be circulated after the meeting.

Members sought clarity on the Targeted Regeneration Investment Fund. Officers explained that it was a Welsh Government fund, where the Council had a successful bid for work on Tudor Road; it was a significant amount and the Council provides an element of match funding.

Members referred to efficiency savings asking if last years had been met and whether officers were confident to meet this years, noting that this year's proposals look modest. Officers stated the Housing and Communities were £700k underspent currently as projects had been unable to be progressed due to Covid; last year's savings had not been made as they could not advance the restructures due to the pandemic. This year the proposal were achievable rather than modest, they were different as they were on the back of so many years of savings.

Members discussed Homelessness wellbeing objective 3 and noted the importance of having activities and events up and running, providing a change of lifestyle.

Members asked for more information on the reduction of staff in Advice and Assessment. Officers clarified that the reduction was in the Assessment team; one of the posts was administrative and was no longer needed now things were done more online; others were where people have cut their hours.

Members discussed the Housing Efficiency Retro-fit programme and asked where the funding was coming from for this and how many houses were being done annually. The Cabinet Member explained it was Welsh Government funding which would get stepped up due to Welsh Governments ambitions for zero carbon.

Members asked if zero carbon would impact on the Council House building programme. Officers explained that they are building to a very high standard of energy efficiency, not carbon neutral as yet as the technology is not there to achieve the cost efficiency as yet. There has to be a balance between delivering homes and carbon footprint.

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.

4 : URGENT ITEMS (IF ANY)

None received.

5 : DATE OF NEXT MEETING - 10 MARCH 2021 AT 4.30PM VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS

The meeting terminated at 4.00 pm