

Ref: RDB/RP/CW/23.02.2021

24 February 2021

Councillor Chris Weaver,
Cabinet Member for Finance, Modernisation & Performance,
Room 519,
County Hall,
Atlantic Wharf,
Cardiff CF10 4UW.



Dear Councillor Weaver,

Environmental Scrutiny Committee – 23 February 2021

On behalf of the Environmental Scrutiny Committee I would like to thank you, Councillor Wild, Councillor Michael and the officers for attending the Committee meeting on Tuesday 23 February 2021. As you are aware the meeting received items titled 'Draft Budget Proposals 2021/22 – Corporate Overview' and 'Draft Corporate Plan 2021 to 2024 & 2021/22 Draft Budget Proposals'.

The meeting initially considered the Corporate Overview and was followed by scrutiny of the draft budget proposals and sections of the draft Corporate Plan relevant to the terms of reference of the Environmental Scrutiny Committee. At the meeting Members had the opportunity to question the relevant Cabinet portfolio holders and supporting officers on their draft budget and Corporate Plan proposals for the coming year. The comments and observations made by Members following this item are set out in this letter.

Corporate Overview

- **Invest to Save** – At the meeting a Member commented on the invest to save schemes included in the capital section of the Corporate Overview presentation. He asked for clarification on how the schemes worked, the typical return on investment and the normal repayment period applied to such initiatives. As agreed with the Head of Finance at the meeting, the Committee would welcome a written summary on invest to save schemes

after the meeting. I would ask that you include a copy of this written summary in the reply to this letter.

- **Socially Valuable Bus Routes** – A Member asked about the £432,000 that had been set aside for ‘Socially Valuable Bus Routes’ as a part of the 2021/22 Financial Resilience Mechanism. She was concerned that this funding might be applied based on historic data which might not be relevant in the post Covid period, and could ultimately result in the Council providing support for empty buses. She asked for assurance that the Council would try to assess post Covid trends before allocating any funding, and that the approach used by the Council to decide where the funds were placed was consistent with the approved Welsh Government methodology.

- **Future Budget Scrutiny** – During the meeting I commented about the future budget challenges facing the Council, and suggested that it might be sensible for Scrutiny to be involved with future budget planning earlier in the year. It was pleasing that you welcomed such an approach, therefore, could you ask Finance officers to liaise with Scrutiny to agree a plan for earlier engagement in 2021/22.

- **Capital Slippage** – Several Members raised the issue of capital slippage at the meeting, and asked for a breakdown of monies that had slipped into the 2021/22 capital budget, against monies that had been specifically allocated into this year. The Head of Finance explained that the ‘Month 9 - Budget Monitoring Report’ that is due at Cabinet in March provided such a breakdown. I would be grateful if you could arrange for a copy of these appendices to be made available to the Committee.

Strategic Planning & Transport Portfolio - Draft Budget Proposals 2021/22

- **Low Traffic Neighbourhoods** – A Member asked about low traffic neighbourhoods, and if the Council had any current plans to introduce

these in Cardiff. She commented that the introduction of these had been controversial in other parts of the United Kingdom, and if the Council had any such plans it would seem sensible to run a thorough community consultation in advance of taking any decisions. The Cabinet Member responded by explaining that work was currently happening on a Clean Healthy Streets project, but added that a growing number of residents had contacted the Council requesting the introduction of low traffic neighbourhoods. As a consequence, the Council is now in the process of gathering information to determine how such a scheme might work, with the caveat that nothing would happen without a proper consultation, probably focusing on a small pilot area first. The Committee welcome this approach, but ask for further clarification on:

- ❖ Details of the next steps that the Council will be following in deciding the future of low traffic neighbourhoods;
 - ❖ An explanation of how the Council would look to deliver any local consultation before deciding if such a scheme is taken forward;
 - ❖ The criteria that the Council might use to decide where it is appropriate to introduce a low traffic neighbourhood.
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- **Staff Resource Matching Funding** – A Member explained that he was delighted to see so much capital funding being made available for a wide range of schemes in the Planning, Transport & Environment Directorate. However, he was a little concerned that the existing staff resource might not be sufficient to deliver the large number of planned projects. The Director for Planning, Transport & Environment acknowledged that it was a challenge, but felt that the work was deliverable. The Committee welcomed this response, but have agreed to monitor the progress made against the new schemes as a part of the 2021/22 work programme.

 - **One Planet Cardiff** – Members were pleased to see additional amounts of £120,000 and £404,000 being allocated towards One Planet Cardiff. While some narrative was provided on where this money would be

invested, it would be appreciated if more detail could be provided on how and why this money would be spent.

- **Fees & Charges - Lines 435 & 444 – Blue Badge Fraud & Car Park Season Passes** – At the meeting I asked about the large fee increases for lines 435 and 444, along with an explanation of how the fees actually worked. I was particularly interested to hear that we were in part benchmarking our car park season passes against other car park providers in the city, so a copy of any benchmarking information used in calculating the change in this parking fee would be welcome. Officers agreed to confirm this information in writing, so I would be grateful if you could include this as a part of the response to this letter.

- **Street Lighting** – At the meeting, a Member raised some concerns about the public safety around the dimming of street lights. She wanted assurance that how and when the dimming occurred had been properly risk assessed to ensure that public safety was the primary concern. With this in mind, it would be appreciated if the following could be provided:
 - ❖ Details of measures that have been put in place to ensure that public safety is not compromised by the dimming of street lighting in Cardiff;
 - ❖ Details of the number of street lights that have been converted to LED in Cardiff, along with the total left for conversion.

Clean Streets, Recycling & Environment Portfolio - Draft Budget Proposals 2021/22

- **Food Strategy** – A Member commented on the funding that had been allocated to support the delivery of the Food Strategy and asked for an explanation on exactly where this would be spent. Officers provided an outline explanation on where funds would be invested, however, stressed that more detailed work was still required. The Committee feel that this is an important piece of work, and so will look to review progress made

against delivering the Food Strategy as a part of the 2021/22 work programme.

- **Household Waste Recycling Centre – North Cardiff** – Members once again noted the £3.2million in capital funding that has been allocated for a new Household Waste Recycling Centre in North Cardiff. They expressed some concern at how long the process was taking, but were told that the delay was due to the challenges of identifying a suitable site in the area. So that the Committee is better able to understand the difficulties involved with finding a new site, I would ask that a summary is provided to the Committee that sets out the work that has taken place to date, the various sites that have been considered, reasons why certain sites were deemed inappropriate, and a list of any potential sites that are currently being considering. Given the sensitive nature of this sort of proposal, the Committee is happy to receive a confidential response or briefing.

- **Lines 363 & 364 - Cardiff Dog Home – Fee Increases** – A Member expressed concern at the large fee increases for dog rehoming at Cardiff Dogs Home. The Cabinet Member explained that the increases were in line with other similar dog charities, for example, The Dogs Trust, but the Member was not convinced, feeling that the increase would simply help push up the cost of dog ownership, which in turn would continue to fuel the recent trend of dog thefts. The Member felt that you should reflect upon and reduce this fee increase.

- **Shared Regulatory Services** – Members noted the changing role of Shared Regulatory Services during the pandemic, with one Member asking how the service planned to adapt to the changing demands as various aspects of the lockdown are gradually relaxed. Predicting how thing might change is very difficult, and so the Committee will look to review the Shared Regulatory Services Business Plan and Annual Report in the early part of 2021/22 to see if the demands being placed on the service are being matched by the financial support provided.

- **Bereavement Cost Comparison** – At the meeting there was some discussion about increasing a number of fees and charges in the Bereavement Service during the pandemic. The Cabinet Member and officers explained that this was a part of a three-year schedule of planned price increases, and that these increases had been benchmarked against other private and local authority providers. The Cabinet Member offered to supply this benchmarking information, so it would be appreciated if this could be provided this as a part of your response to this letter.

- **Fly Tipping** – Members note that the target set for fly tipping fines collected had been reduced for 2021/22; they understand that the change was made to help establish a more realistic target. The Committee will monitor progress against this revised target during 2021/22.

Requests for following this scrutiny:

- 1) **Invest to Save Schemes** – Provide a written summary on invest to save schemes that explains how they operate, typical return on investment, and repayment periods.

- 2) **Socially Valuable Bus Routes** – Provide assurance that the Council would try to assess post Covid trends before allocating any funding, and that the approach used by the Council to decide where the funds are placed is consistent with the approved Welsh Government methodology.

- 3) **Capital Slippage** – Arrange for the appendices in the ‘Month 9 - Budget Monitoring Report’ that address capital to be made available to the Committee.

- 4) **Low Traffic Neighbourhoods** – To provide details of the next steps that the Council will be following in deciding the future of low traffic neighbourhoods; an explanation of how the Council would look to deliver any local consultation before deciding if such a scheme is taken forward;

the criteria that the Council might use to decide where it is appropriate to introduce a low traffic neighbourhood.

- 5) **One Planet Cardiff** – Provide details of how the additional funding for One Planet Cardiff would be spent.
- 6) **Fees & Charges - Lines 435 & 444 – Blue Badge Fraud & Car Park Season Passes** – Provide clarification on lines 435 and 444 of the fees and charges schedule, explaining exactly what they are and how they operate.
- 7) **Street Lighting** – Provide details of measures that have been put in place to ensure that public safety is not compromised by the dimming of street lighting in Cardiff; and the number of street lights that have been converted to LED in Cardiff, along with the total left for conversion.
- 8) **Household Waste Recycling Centre – North Cardiff** – Provide a summary of the work that has taken place to date, the various sites that have been considered, reasons why certain sites were deemed inappropriate, and a list of any potential sites that are currently being considering. Given the sensitive nature of this sort of proposal, the Committee is happy to receive a confidential response or briefing.
- 9) **Bereavement Cost Comparison** – To provide a copy of the benchmarking information which compares the Council against other local authorities and other private providers, and which was used to support the price increase.

Recommendations to be monitored following this scrutiny:

- 1) **Future Budget Scrutiny** – That you ask Finance officers to liaise with Scrutiny to agree a plan for earlier engagement in 2021/22.

- 2) **Lines 363 & 364 - Cardiff Dog Home – Fee Increases** – To reflect upon and reduce this fee increase.

I would be grateful if you would consider the above comments and work with the relevant Cabinet portfolio holders to provide a response to the content of this letter.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ramesh Patel', enclosed in a thin black rectangular border.

Councillor Ramesh Patel
Chairperson Environmental Scrutiny Committee
Cc:

- Councillor Huw Thomas, Leader, Cardiff Council;
- Councillor Caro Wild, Cabinet Member Strategic Planning & Transport;
- Councillor Michael Michael, Cabinet Member Clean Streets, Recycling & Environment;
- Chris Lee, Corporate Director Resources;
- Ian Allwood, Head of Finance;
- Andrew Gregory, Director of Planning, Transport & Environment;
- Neil Hanratty, Director of Economic Development;
- Matt Wakelam, Assistant Director Street Scene;
- Davina Fiore, Director of Governance & Legal Services;
- Gary Jones, Head of Democratic Services;
- Members of Cardiff's Environmental Scrutiny Committee.