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Date: 28 February 2024



Councillor Chris Weaver

Dear Councillor Weaver,

Environmental Scrutiny Committee – 27th February 2024.

DRAFT BUDGET 2024/25 & DRAFT CORPORATE PLAN 2024 - 2027

On behalf of the Environmental Scrutiny Committee, I would like to thank you, your Cabinet colleagues and officers for attending Committee to facilitate our consideration of the Draft Budget 2024/25 and the Draft Corporate Plan 2024-27.

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. Members agreed that I pass on the following observations to inform Cabinet discussion later this week. You will find our recommendations and requests, listed at the end of the letter.

Corporate Overview

Members noted that it was positive that following the consultation exercise some of the proposed service changes were not now being taken forward.

Committee members also noted with concern comments made in the consultation that the Councils accounts have not been audited in the last two years. Officers reassured the members that this was possibly the case in England, however, not in Wales, although delays were acknowledged due to Audit Wales capacity/workload.

Members asked if sufficient funding has been allocated to support the delivery of the One Planet Cardiff Strategy. You recognised the challenge to meet net

zero by 2030, and commented that the issues to deliver net zero lie beyond the control of the Council , however the many issues are being addressed and the OPC action plan will be reviewed and there is a commitment to continue to deliver against the strategy.

The Committee asked how challenging had it been to set the budget this year compared to previous years? You and officers agreed that it had been very challenging although for different reasons than previous years i.e. the cost of living currently and the rate of inflation. The committee also asked about the use of general and earmarked reserves to help build the budget. Officers commented that theses are constantly monitored and review , however they play a relatively small part in balancing the budget, and that a risk based approach is taken to ensure ongoing financial resilience.

Members appreciated that 'back office' efficiencies are sought before service changes that impact delivery of front line services, however, the question was asked, how long this continue before frontline services are affected? You commented that this will differ across the Directorates, and that use of technology can support changes to that way services are delivered. However, if current budget trans continue, difficult and potentially damaging service change will need to be made.

A Member asked about the impact of 'mothballing' parts of building has had on insurance, .e.g. the need to maintain the building at a certain temperature. Officers were confident that there were no issues that they were aware of, and that insurers had recently visited County Hall.

The Committee asked how the level of Council tax had been determined and whether a higher increase had been considered. You responded that local Councils will make decision and choices based on their local circumstance and that the decision had been made recognising the cost of living impact for residents and the need to develop a balanced and resilient budget going forward.

Cllr Wild - Recycling & Neighbourhood Services

Members raised concerns about the potential change to three weekly collection of residual waste for households with pets. Officers commented that some wood-based materials were able to be recycled, and that information on the website needed to be updated to ensure residents were able to make informed decisions and choices regarding the disposal of pet waste materials.

The Committee asked about RNSE4 and how the review of Street Cleansing vacant posts would impact on service delivery? Officer clarified that the £151,000 represented approximately 5 posts out of a service of circa 150 WTE (3.33%) and that by working 'smarter' there will be no impact to service delivery. Officers also noted the proposed shift changes at the Materials Recycling Facility, that currently operates a two shift system and the wish to modernise and move to a single shift that would enable management support during operating hours.

A member asked why there was no proposed increase to FPNs, for 'poor' behaviour, when charges for 'doing the right thing' i.e. bulky waste collections were being increased. Officers explained that FPN charges are determined by Welsh Government and that Cardiff is at the higher end of the charges, and with regard to bulky waste collections, the charges are set to provide residents with a viable and competitive alternative to a commercial company. Following this members asked if there was a danger that fly tipping would increase as a result of the increased charges. Officers commented that yes there is always a risk that fly tipping will increase however, there will always be those that disrespect their environment and that fly tipping is usually the result of private contractors, disposing of waste without a licence and not residents.

Members asked about RNSE1, review and restructure of recycling waste treatment, depot and restructure and the risk analyses being red/amber. Officers clarified that the recent 6 month of strike action has impacted on the delivery of this work and that a lot of work is going on to make the changes as

painless as possible, and that there was a need to change as the service has remained the same for a significant period.

In relation to RNSSC2 – Residual collections, why is this still being considered when the outcome of the consultation shows there is little public support.

Officers explained that segregated waste and three weekly collections are Welsh Government policy to meet their recycling target of 70%. Officers also reminded the committee that there is currently an historical fiscal penalty of circa £3m with the potential of an additional £1.9m if recycling targets continue not to be met. There were also comments that if the wording of the question in the consultation had been structured differently the response may have been more positive.

The Committee asked how much money does the Enforcement Team bring in? Officers replied approximately 15/20% of the cost of the service. It was acknowledged that there was also a balance between education and enforcement and that it was hoped the restructure would support changes going forward.

The Committee asked about the use of Agency staff, and officers commented that there would always need to be some on the books due to some seasonal services e.g. garden waste, however more were moving to permanent contracts and there was a wish to have more 'multi functional' staff to support digitising of some services.

Members asked about the deferral of the introduction of garden waste collection services. Officers advised that currently no decisions have been made and the work was ongoing with colleagues in the Vales of Glamorgan Council where charges were introduced 18 months ago. Based on their experience charges would be approximately £30-40, and with a 20% uptake of the service generate about £900k. Officers reiterated that the council can only statutorily charge for the collection of waste and not the disposal, however any green waste collected would contribute to the Council's overall recycling rates.

The Committee asked about sickness absence rates in the service are that have traditionally been comparatively high. Officers acknowledged that last year the rate was 22 FTE days per year and that the target going forward was 20 days. It was noted that the strike had had an impact on managing this and however there has been an impact on long term sickness absence.

Members also comments on the continued issues of the absence of a Household Waste Recycling Centre (HWRC) in North Cardiff. Councillor Wild stated that he believes the city does not need a third HWRC, and commented that what is needed is a different model of recycling, repair and reuse centre, and that officers have already been tasked with finding a suitable site.

Members asked about the potential to charge more for a bulky waste 'quick' pick up service. Officers commented that the service has been impacted by the strike action and that the aim of the service is to pick up within 48 hours.

In terms of accessing services digitally, i.e. booking collection HWRC visits, it was noted that this digital interface may be difficult for the elderly. These concerns were noted and C2C staff were available to support those unable to access services digitally and work would be ongoing with the 'digital team' to make them as accessible as possible.

Cllr Wild - Climate Change

Members asked about the potential to replicate Radyr Wier to provider more income/energy generation. Officers stated that this was not currently intended although more energy generation from solar farms is being explored.

Members also asked about the potential energy generation from the Severn Estuary and the work of the Western Gateway, Cllr Wild commented that this was in the early stages, following the recent appointment of a chair and the potential links to the Aberthaw Cardiff Capital Region site.

The committee asked if sufficient funding has been allocated to meet the significant challenges of delivering the One Planet Cardiff Strategy. It was noted that some of the projects e.g. coastal flood defence are Welsh Government funded. However there were challenges in relation to transport and the biggest challenge is in relation to the retrofit of schools and houses. It

was noted that UK council have the same concerns and that a Cabinet Report will be coming forward. Cllr Wild also noted the potential opportunities in relation to the workforce that would be required if funding was made available to undertake the retrofitting.

Cllr De'Ath - Transport & Strategic Planning

The Committee asked if the target in relation to modal shift is achievable given the recent cuts to bus services. Officers responded that significant infrastructure is required to support the planned sustainable travel options i.e. Metro, CrossRail, bus priority routes, cycleways and parking zones, along with behaviour change by residents. It was also recognised that some bus services will always need to be subsidised as they have failed to attract passenger numbers that were travelling pre-pandemic. It is anticipated that bus corridors will assist in the improvement in running times and reliability. The proposed franchising of bus services was also noted as a positive as it would allow cross subsidisation of profitable and non profitable routes. The walking distance to access key bus corridors was noted as a concern by members for the elderly and disabled, and that this needed to be addressed. to 'tempt' people to use the services. It was also noted that an efficient, reliable, integrated transport system is essential to deliver this modal shift.

The issues raised by the committee in relation to parking included:

- Removal of free parking
- New parking charges/tariffs
- Visitor permits
- Enforcement
- Parking Machines

Officers responded that the risk rating of achieving some of the saving related to parking was in relation to the consultation process required to introduce charges and zones and the related Traffic Regulation Orders, and only part year savings being achieved.

The issue noted about a number of machines not working was explained as the transition from 3G to 4G systems which are being rolled out.

Members notes the availability of S106 planning gain monies and following the Joint T&F report reiterated the recommendation for visibility of how and where the monies are spent. Officers noted that developers will also deliver schools and roads as part of planning agreements.

No requests for additional information or formal recommendations were made.

Once again thank you once more for attending Committee and for considering our comments and observations.

Yours sincerely,



Councillor Owen Jones

Chairperson Environmental Scrutiny Committee

Cc: *Members of the Environmental Scrutiny Committee*

Cllr Caro Wild, Cabinet Member, Climate Change

Cllr Dan De'Ath, Cabinet Member Transport & Strategic Planning

Cllr Joel Williams, Chair of PRAP

Chris Lee, Corporate Director, Resources

Ian Allwood, Head of Finance

Neil Hanratty, Director, Economic Development

Andrew Gregory, Director, Planning, Transport & Environment

Matt Wakelam, Assistant Director, Street Scene

Claire Moggridge, Head of Transport

Simon Gilbert, Head of Planning

Cllr John Lancaster, Group Leader, Conservatives

Cllr Andrea Gibson, Group Leader, Common Ground

Cllr Rodney Berman, Group Leader, Liberal Democrats

Chris Pyke, OM Governance & Audit

Tim Gordon, Head of Communications & External Relations

Claire Deguara, Cabinet Business Manager