



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNCIL OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY 2022-2027 COMMITTEE

Minutes of the virtual meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny 2022-2027 Committee meeting held on
Wednesday, 25 January 2023 at 5.00 pm

This meeting was recorded, details of which can be accessed [here](#)

County Borough Councillors - Overview and Scrutiny 2022-2027 Committee Members in attendance:-

Councillor J Brencher	Councillor M Ashford
Councillor J Bonetto	Councillor S Evans
Councillor G Hughes	Councillor C Middle
Councillor K Morgan	Councillor W Owen
Councillor G L Warren	Councillor K Webb
Councillor G E Williams	

Officers in attendance

Mr C Hanagan, Service Director of Democratic Services & Communication
Mr P Griffiths, Service Director – Finance & Improvement Services
Mrs S Daniel – Principal Democratic and Scrutiny Officer

37 Declarations of Interest

None received

38 Minutes

RESOLVED: To approve the minutes of the meeting held on the 29 November 2022

39 Consultation Links

The Principal Scrutiny Officer advised members of the open consultations available for them to feed into. She further advised if members had any queries to contact the Scrutiny Team

40 Audit Wales: Public Sector Readiness For Net Zero Carbon By 2030

The Service Director Democratic Services and Communication presented the report to provide Members with the latest Audit Wales (AW) National report and to provide the opportunity for Members to review the Recommendations in the context of our work and the Council's response. Also, to note the position of the report in the wider context of Audit Wales 2021/22 work programme, which will be reflected in its Audit Summary published later this year.

Feedback was provided around the risk of not reaching the very ambitious target for 2030 and Members emphasised that we need collaboration across all organisations, particularly in large organisations, where departments may work in silo and plans/ policies/ strategies may not be cross referenced. It was noted that this could be improved upon. For example, the decision made by Cabinet on moving to 3-weekly refuse collections and the contribution this will have in achieving net zero carbon targets. A Member questioned if the Authority will be monitoring increased journeys to the recycling centres as a result of the above decision being implemented.

The Service Director Democratic Services advised that Scrutiny can undertake a piece of work monitoring the impact of decisions and added that much of this is already detailed in performance reports presented to Scrutiny. The Service Director also noted that the Council's Carbon Reduction Strategy will also be scrutinised by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The Authority has also been looking at a toolkit that has been developed by Manchester University, which scores all decisions in terms of Climate Change, this is being adopted by Welsh Government and we are looking to become the first local authority in Wales to see how we can implement this and how this can support the Scrutiny process.

A Member recommended the five Calls to Action and the questions "Senior leaders and those who scrutinise them may want to ask" be referred to Overview and Scrutiny as part of the Carbon Reduction Strategy report.

In response to a question around how the Authority works with other organisations who are all trying to achieve the same goal, the Service Director Democratic Services and Communication advised that collaboration is detailed throughout the report and is an important consideration for the public sector as a whole. He added that the Cwm Taf PSB Joint Overview and Scrutiny had met recently and provided challenge in respect of medium and longer term decisions in areas such as Climate Change. The Carbon Reduction Strategy will include how we will work with other organisations and if all are keeping pace. This will include a more detailed action plan and data to include milestones.

A Member asked if the Council's supply chains are also considered as part of the Strategy. The Service Director Democratic Services and Communication advised the Committee that the Carbon Reduction Strategy does consider our supply chains and whilst there are many benefits of bringing supplies closer to home, such as reducing our Carbon Footprint, Value for Money also needs to be a consideration.

The Service Director Democratic Services and Communication advised in response to Members comments that the Authority is engaging with the public in working towards reducing carbon emissions and ensuring that it is understood and communicated as a shared responsibility. He added

that this is demonstrated in the Strategy.

Following discussion it was **RESOLVED** to

1. Note the report of Audit Wales in respect of, '[Public Sector Readiness for Net Zero Carbon by 2030](#)' at Appendix 1.
2. Reviewed and agreed to refer the 'Calls for Action' as set out in the Action Plan at Appendix 2 to Scrutiny when they consider the Carbon Reduction Strategy.

41 Council Progress Update - Audit Wales Equality Impact Assessments: more than a tick box exercise?

The Service Director Democratic Services and Communication presented the report to provide Members with the latest Audit Wales (AW) National report and to provide the opportunity for Members to review the recommendations in the context of our work and the Council's response. Also, to note the position of the report in the wider context of the Audit Wales 2021/22 work programme, which will be reflected in its Audit Summary published in March 2023.

Members discussed that they see so many action plans, strategies and targets that there is a huge risk of the Impact Assessments being a "tick box exercise" not just in the Council but across lots of organisations. They asked if they do have concerns about negative impacts where a decision is being taken where can they find the monitoring for the decisions

The Service Director Democratic Services and Communication advised that there is a comprehensive review process in place to support robust decision making and added that we will challenge ourselves through review arrangements to ensure it is not a tick box exercise. The Service Director noted that the Council's approach will be kept under on-going review and will be subject to scrutiny.

In response to a query regarding the collection of data, the Service Director Democratic Services and Communication advised that the Authority has appointed a dedicated officer to provide the RCT specific data to support decisions and the impact they may have on RCT, for example, Census data will be brought forward through scrutiny to consider how this can support Members in scrutinising decisions in the future.

Members discussed that many residents feel that their consultation responses and comments they make on social media are not taken notice of and what the Council can do to demonstrate that feedback is taken account of. The Service Director Democratic Services and Communication advised that the Participation Strategy will include a “you said, we did” section. He added that it is always challenging when difficult decisions are being considered, with the need for the Council to continue its open and honest approach when consulting with the public.

Following discussion it was **RESOLVED** to

1. Note the report of Audit Wales in respect of, '[Equality Impact Assessments: more than a tick box exercise?](#)' seen at **Appendix 1**.
2. Review and agree the response to the 'Recommendations' and Improvement Areas as set out in the Action Plan at **Appendix 2**, providing regular up-dates of progress, determine whether further information and/or further progress updates are required.

42 Budget Consultation 2023-24 (Phase 2)

The Service Director Democratic Services and Communication presented the report to Members and advised that under their Terms of Reference the Committee is a formal consultee of the Council's annual budget consultation process.

With the aid of a PowerPoint presentation, the Service Director – Finance & Improvement Services provided Members with an overview of the Budget Consultation 2023/24 (Phase 2) and updated the Committee on the following areas: Introduction – 2023/24 Draft Revenue Budget Strategy; The Council's Current Financial Position (2022/23); Phase 1 Budget Consultation – Headlines; Provisional Local Government Settlement 2023/24 – Headlines/Implications for Rhondda Cynon Taf; Cabinet Proposed Budget Strategy 2023/24; and Next steps and key dates.

Further to the Service Director's overview of the Cabinet's proposed Budget Strategy for 2023/24, a Member sought feedback on what opportunities are available to review the methodology for the allocation of funding from UK Government to Welsh Government and thereafter to local authorities, linked to Rhondda Cynon Taf Council's provisional settlement of +6.6% compared to the all Wales average local authority settlement of +7.9%. The Service Director fed back that with regard to the process for the allocation of funding from Welsh Government to local

authorities across Wales, a designated group is in place comprising Welsh Government and local government representatives to ensure the basis for the allocation of funding is representative of need and that the data sets underpinning the allocations are appropriate and accurate. The Service Director provided assurance that Rhondda Cynon Taf Council is part of these arrangements to inform and challenge data sets and the basis for the allocation of funding.

The Service Director then invited Members to provide feedback on the following areas of the Cabinet's proposed Budget Strategy for 2023/24.

Council Tax – 3.5% proposed increase

- Taken into consideration the Council's approach to setting Council Tax levels in recent times, Rhondda Cynon Taf being the lowest average Band D increase in Wales for 3 out of the past 4 years, the majority of Members agreed the proposed increase is a pragmatic and sensible approach.
- A Member fed back that the proposed percentage increase of 3.5% is likely to be on the lower end when compared with other local authorities in Wales; however, the Council knew budget challenges have been present but still set Council Tax at a 1% increase for 2022/23 compared to a proposed 3.5% increase for 2023/24.

Schools Budget

- A Member fed back that it is an inevitable requirement for schools to review their budget and the amount they hold in reserves to support financial planning due to the challenging funding position, and noted that the level of reserves will be different across schools linked to the plans schools have in place for the utilisation of such reserves.
- Another Member fed back that it is important the message is conveyed to schools that they will not be fully funded for 2023/24. The Service Director fed back that the proposed Budget Strategy allocated funding in full to cover school costs, with the requirement for schools to then make a 2.2% efficiency saving, this being less than the indicative target of 2.75% provided to schools in autumn 2022 and less than the efficiency requirement for non-school services of 7.7%.
- Another Member noted that some schools are older with resultant higher energy costs and requested clarity around what opportunities are there to make efficiencies in these schools. The Service Director fed back that the Council undertakes an on-going programme of building surveys across schools that include identifying opportunities to install energy efficiency measures to reduce energy consumption. The Service Director added that the Council has, for a number of years, provided funding for an invest

to save fund, with school and non-school based projects funded from this resource.

Efficiencies

- Members agreed with the Council's approach to continue to maximise efficiency savings and commended officers on delivering year-on-year efficiency savings and an on-going approach to find new ways of working.
- A Member endorsed this approach and noted that in delivering efficiencies, this should not result in service delivery becoming less effective and on-going review is required to monitor impact.
- Another Member sought assurance around the staffing implications of delivering efficiencies. The Service Director fed back that detailed planning is undertaken to support the delivery of efficiencies and, where staffing changes are required, these are managed via natural staff turnover, redeployment and the Council's voluntary redundancy / retirement schemes, and through close working with Trade Union colleagues.

Fees and Charges

- The majority of Members agreed that the fees and charges proposals are realistic, in line with what the Council needs to do to achieve a balanced budget and demonstrate that charges for Council services remain competitive and provide value for money compared to neighbouring areas.
- A Member felt there were some contradictions in the proposals compared to the feedback received from the public as part of the phase 1 budget consultation process. In particular, the public highlighted that services such as social care and leisure services were important to them and the budget strategy is proposing increases to fees and charges in these areas, which could result in a false economy.
- Another Member noted if the option to charge a higher fee for the Lido (Pontypridd) for non-Rhondda Cynon Taf residents could be considered to help manage the number of block bookings and 'no shows'. The Service Director noted the feedback.

Use of Reserves

- Members agreed with the proposed approach to the use of reserves.
- A Member sought clarity on how reserves will be replenished in future years. The Service Director fed back that Council officers review base budget requirements and saving opportunities on an

on-going basis and has a track record of delivering in-year savings that are then allocated to the Council's Transitional Funding reserve. The Service Director added that for the current financial year, in-year savings of £3.003M have been identified, as at September 2022, and have been transferred to the Transitional Funding reserve. In addition, the Service Director fed back that the Council applies a prudent and sensible approach in the utilisation of its reserves.

Following conclusion of discussions it was **RESOLVED** to Authorise the Service Director Democratic Services and Communication to formulate a response on behalf of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to Council's Phase 2 Budget Consultation

43 Urgent Items

None

44 Chairs Review and Close

The Chair thanked all Members and officers for attending and for their feedback, particularly into the Budget Consultation

This meeting closed at 7.25 pm

**J Edwards
Chair**