



RHONDDA CYNON TAF

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNCIL JOINT CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

Minutes of the virtual meeting of the Joint Consultative Committee meeting held on Monday, 5 February 2024 at 12.00 pm.

County Borough Councillors - Joint Consultative Committee Members in attendance:-

Councillor M Webber (Chair)

Councillor A Morgan

Councillor A Crimmings

Trade Union Members in Attendance

Mr P Crews (Unison)

Mr C Jones (GMB)

Ms L Davies (Unite)

Mr A McCarthy (Unite)

Officers in attendance

Mr R Evans, Director of Human Resources

Mr P Griffiths, Service Director – Finance & Improvement Services

7 DECLARATION OF INTEREST

In accordance with the Council's Code of Conduct, there were no declarations of interest pertaining to the agenda.

8 APOLOGY

An apology for absence was received from County Borough Councillor G Caple.

9 MINUTES

RESOLVED to approve the minutes of the 20th December 2023 as an accurate reflection of the meeting.

10 BUDGET CONSULTATION 2024/25 (PHASE 2)

The Service Director Finance and Improvement Services presented the report to Members which provided the Committee the opportunity to formally respond to the second phase of the Council's 2024-25 Budget Consultation.

The Service Director Finance and Improvement Services then gave a presentation to Members of the Committee and covered the following areas: Introduction – 2024/25 Draft Revenue Budget Strategy; The Council's Current Financial Position (2023/24); Phase 1 Budget Consultation – Headlines; and Provisional Local Government Settlement 2024/25 – Headlines/Implications for Rhondda Cynon Taf.

Before continuing to cover the remaining element of the presentation in respect of the Cabinet Proposed Budget Strategy 2024/25 and Next steps

and key dates, the Chair fed back the implications of needing to deliver significant budget savings year-on-year and the very difficult financial outlook all local authorities across Wales are facing. The Chair noted that 75.6% of respondents to the phase 1 consultation fed back that a reasonable increase in Council Tax to contribute to closing the budget gap was preferable.

The Leader of the Council, Councillor A Morgan, commented on the Council's proposed Council Tax level that is being consulted upon, advising that the proposed 4.9% was at the lower end of the spectrum in comparison to council tax levels being proposed by other Welsh Local Authorities. Councillor Morgan also commented on the importance of setting a Council Tax level that took into account residents' ability to pay and recognising that income from council tax is an important funding source to the Council to support service delivery.

Councillor Morgan continued by referencing the significant level of efficiency savings that have once again been identified and built into the proposed budget strategy alongside a much smaller level of service changes that are deemed necessary due to funding levels being well below that needed to address budget pressures facing the Council. Councillor Morgan added that should the local authority funding position improve in the medium to long term, opportunity is available for service changes that will be implemented in 2024/25 to be revisited.

The Service Director continued the presentation by outlining the detail of Cabinet's proposed Budget Strategy and welcomed feedback and comments from members of the Committee.

The importance of communication was highlighted, with Members commenting on the usefulness of the information within Council Tax notices, explaining how Council Tax income is utilised, and it was agreed that this information would be shared, when available, with Trade Union colleagues.

The Chair provided comment on a number of areas proposed within the budget strategy and specifically referenced the Council's on-going commitment to its successful Apprenticeship and Graduate schemes, with posts being funded by individual service areas, and the introduction of a booking fee in respect of the Lido Pontypridd, noting the rationale for the proposed fee and that prices would remain competitive for users.

Mr P Crews (Unison) commented on the reduction in the Social Care Workforce Grant announced by Welsh Government, indicating the need to inform Welsh Government of the impact the reduction in funding would have on the Council. In addition, clarity was requested on the future funding arrangements for the Graduate and Apprenticeship schemes, referring to this being met by individual service areas, and what monitoring would be in place to ensure the continued success and

momentum of these schemes.

Councillor Morgan fed back that monitoring arrangements for both schemes are in place via the Senior Leadership Team, with updates provided to himself and the Deputy Leader for consideration. Councillor Morgan also highlighted the on-going importance of the Council 'growing its own talent' through these schemes, with the Council committed to ensuring resources continue to be in place to support these areas.

The Service Director also provided assurance that on-going work takes place with services as part of workforce planning arrangements, to identify the business need for graduate and apprentices, with budget management processes ensuring the necessary funding is in place.

In respect of the Social Care Workforce Grant it was confirmed that the overall savings built into the draft budget strategy, alongside the use of transition funding, takes account of the reduced level of grant. The Service Director also indicated that as part of on-going engagement with Welsh Government, the impact of the reduction in grant has been fed back.

Mr C Jones (GMB) welcomed the update regarding the apprenticeship and graduate schemes and went on to highlight concerns in respect of the proposed uplift to car parking charges and the potential financial hardship this would place on some staff. Councillor Morgan noted the availability of season parking tickets, with the price proposed to be frozen for 2024/25, and indicated that if there are specific cases to be looked into further, for these to be fed back.

Mr Jones also took the opportunity to note the Day Centre proposals and spoke of concerns of the impact on the most vulnerable residents in the County Borough.

Ms L Davies (Unite) focussed on the proposed charge for Meals on Wheels and referenced whether there had been a decline in the service following the previous service change introduced. Ms Davies noted the vulnerability of service users and the financial and social impact the proposed increase may have on them. The Deputy Leader reiterated the importance of the service, noted that rising food costs was the reason for the proposed meal price increase and commented on the quality meals that were available as part of the service.

The Service Director noted the important service the Meals on Wheels Service provides and its links to social care services within the Council. The Service Director went on to note that the Council continues to subsidise the service, with the meal price to customers at the lower end of the spectrum compared to neighbouring local authorities. The Service Director added that further information will be requested in respect of current service take-up.

Mr McCarthy (Unite) requested further information in respect of Council investment to develop a solar farm and the associated generation and sale of energy. The Service Director fed back that an agreement is in place with Royal Glamorgan Hospital, with the Council responsible for funding the project and owning the asset, with income to be generated from 2024/25. The Service Director added that specific information in respect of the arrangement is commercially sensitive and would enquire whether further detail could be provided.

Members of the Trade Unions highlighted the importance of good communication links between the Council and Trade Unions, and the need for on-going communication on budget savings and their implementation, if agreed by the Council. The Director of Human Resources fed back that arrangements are in place to ensure open dialogue continues to take place.

Mr McCarthy posed the question to the Committee in respect of the ethical treatment of agency labour and the Director of Human Resources commented upon the discussions that have taken place in this regard and the phased approach being progressed.

The Chair thanked all Members for their contributions to the meeting and following discussions it was **RESOLVED**:

1. To provide feedback on the draft 2024/25 Revenue Budget Strategy as part of phase 2 of the Council's 2024-25 Budget Consultation

This meeting closed at 1.30 pm

**M Webber
Chairman.**