



APPENDIX 3

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNCIL FINANCE AND PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the virtual meeting of the Finance and Performance Scrutiny Committee held on
Wednesday, 2 February 2022 at 5.00 pm.

County Borough Councillors - Finance and Performance Scrutiny Committee Members in attendance:-

Councillor M Powell (Chair)

Councillor G Thomas	Councillor S Bradwick
Councillor S Evans	Councillor A Fox
Councillor E George	Councillor J Williams
Councillor T Williams	Councillor R Yeo

Officers in attendance:-

Mr P Griffiths, Service Director – Finance & Improvement Services
Ms W Edwards, Service Director – Community Services
Ms S Davies - Head of Education & Financial Reporting
Ms N Lewis - Programmes Co-ordinator
Mr A Wilkins – Director of Legal Services
Mrs T Watson – Senior Democratic & Scrutiny Officer
Mrs S Handy – Members’ Researcher & Scrutiny Officer

County Borough Councillors in attendance:-

Co-Opted Members in attendance:

Mr J Fish – Parent/Governor Representative

44 Scrutiny Research Function

The Members’ Researcher and Scrutiny Officer referenced the research facilities that were available to Members within the Council Business Unit. Members were advised that if they have any specific queries to email them to Scrutiny@rctcbc.gov.uk.

45 Declaration of Interest

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

Extract from the minutes

Budget Consultation 2022/23 (Phase 2)

With the aid of a PowerPoint presentation, the Service Director – Finance & Improvement Services provided Members with an overview of the Budget Consultation 2022/23 (Phase 2) and updated the Committee on the following 6 areas:

- Introduction – 2022/23 Draft Revenue Budget Strategy
- Council's Current Financial Position (2021/22)
- Phase 1 Budget Consultation – Headlines
- Provisional Local Government Settlement 2022/23 – Headlines/Implications for Rhondda Cynon Taf
- Cabinet Proposed Budget Strategy 2022/23
- Next steps and key dates

Further to the Service Director's overview of the Cabinet's proposed Budget Strategy, Members were provided with the opportunity to ask questions and feedback their views on each of the following six areas:

- Council Tax
- Schools Budget
- Social Services Funding
- Efficiencies
- Fees and Charges
- Targeted Investment
- Use of Reserves

The Chair asked if it was acceptable for written feedback to also be submitted following the meeting. The Service Director confirmed that the phase 2 consultation runs until 11th February and all points of clarity and feedback would be welcomed within this timeframe.

Councillor Fox referred to the additional investment and commented that the areas highlighted for additional funding were completely justified and was in full support of them. Councillor Fox also fed back that it was particularly pleasing to see the proposal for the minimum rate of pay increase to £10 for the Council's own staff and commissioned social care staff, above the Real Living Wage rate of £9.90, and emphasised this was the real living wage level calculated on the true cost of living, as opposed to the national living wage. Councillor Fox added that Rhondda Cynon Taf needed to lead by example and this proposal would improve the lives of some of the lowest paid in employment.

Councillor Evans referred to the Council Tax slide and stated that it was good to see such consistent year-on-year low council tax rises and highlighted that the proposal for 2022/23 would equate to an increase of 20p per week for a Band A property and an increase of 30p a week for a Band D property. Councillor Evans fed back that the 1% proposed increase was the right decision for people at this time and struck the right balance between affordability of Rhondda Cynon Taf residents to pay and the range of services provided, and also considering the other budget strategy proposals that will see additional investment in schools, social care and a number of frontline services.

Councillor Bradwick referred to car parking charges and supported the freeze in prices and also supported the approach to the delivery of efficiency savings that do not impact on frontline services, noting the positive position where £16.5M of efficiencies had been delivered in the past 3 financial years. Members of the

Committee were also in agreement with the position in respect of efficiencies. Councillor Bradwick also requested clarification on whether pest control fees would be frozen and the Service Director fed back that the proposal is for pest control fees to be increased by 2.5%. Councillor Bradwick and Councillor T Williams fed back a preference for pest control fees to be frozen and Councillors Yeo and Fox noted that although they would prefer the prices to be frozen, they recognised the high standard of service delivered by the Council's Pest Control Service and this being competitively priced. Councillor Bradwick went on to thank Council Officers for their work in supporting the budget setting process and was pleased that the proposed budget will see schools fully funded for the forthcoming year.

Councillor Yeo referred to page 18 of the presentation that set out the proposal for Community and Children's Services funding to be increased by over £15M next year and noted that this was extremely welcomed and asked what this increase would equate to in percentage terms. Councillor Yeo also supported the increases to the other budget areas and the proposed fees and charges areas to be frozen, noting the significant squeeze on the cost of living for households that included the National Insurance rise, increases in fuel and a freeze in Universal Credit. Councillor Yeo went on to say that against this difficult backdrop for households, the 1% increase in Council Tax was also welcomed alongside the proposed areas for additional investment and increase to the minimum rate of pay for Council staff and commissioned social care staff. Councillor Yeo added that the proposed budget strategy will do the right thing for residents across the County Borough and thanked officers for their work in supporting the budget setting process.

The Service Director – Finance and Improvement Services provided feedback on the question raised by Councillor Yeo in respect of what the proposed increase in the Community and Children's Services budget would equate to in percentage terms, this being an 8.9% increase.

Councillor T Williams was supportive of the proposed freezes to specific fees and charges, noting that these areas demonstrate that the Cabinet is looking to prioritise the right things. Councillor T Williams added that the proposals will prioritise the needs of the people of Rhondda Cynon Taf and was supportive of the 2022/23 budget strategy.

Mr Fish, the Parent/Governor Representative commended the schools' budget and fed back it was pleasing to see this area once again being protected, along with other Council services, and the positive position of school pay and non-pay inflationary pressures proposed to be fully funded. Mr Fish referred to the likelihood of volatile inflationary pressures during 2022/23 and requested clarity around what further support the Council could provide and also requested the period over which school meal prices will be frozen. The Service Director fed back that the proposed budget strategy has allocated all available funding to school and non-school service areas, and the Council will continue to work closely with schools to ensure the continuation of robust financial management arrangements; opportunities to deliver cost savings through areas such as the on-going effective deployment of procurement processes and energy efficiency measures; and ensuring school reserve levels are optimised to provide some flexibility to meet in-year cost pressures during the next financial year. The Service Director went on to confirm that school meal prices will be frozen for the 2022/23 financial year. Mr Fish added that he also had questions in relation to the medium-term outlook and the impact on education provision; however, as

these did not directly impact on the proposed 2022/23 budget strategy, Mr Fish indicated that he would email these to Council officers separately.

Councillor Bradwick requested an update on electric charging points, particularly in Aberdare and Pontypridd car parks and also the position with regard to trialling electric taxis. The Service Director – Finance and Improvement Services fed back that resources have been allocated to support the electric charging vehicle infrastructure within the County Borough and work is on-going to apply for external funding to also support this work. The Service Director indicated that he would obtain an update on the current position with regard to works at Aberdare and Pontypridd car parks and trialling electric taxis.

The Chair continued the discussion and noted the proposal to increase the mileage rate from 35p to 40p per mile for staff who use their vehicles for Council business at a cost of £0.118M. The Chair indicated that this equates to 2,316,000 miles being travelled per year and requested clarity on how this aligns with the Council's carbon zero ambitions by 2030 and the impact of more staff working from home as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Service Director – Finance and Improvement Services fed back that the 2021/22 budget strategy included a significant reduction in the budget for car mileage expenses, this reduction being achievable due to staff working from home / remotely, on-going digitisation of processes that did not require attendance at office locations and undertaking specific functions and meetings virtually via Teams / Zoom. The Service Director added that the 2022/23 proposed budget strategy includes a further, albeit lower, reduction in the car mileage budget, and reflected an overall reducing trend around the level of business mileage being required. The Service Director went on to indicate that many Council Services, due to their nature, require Council officers to incur business mileage, for example, to have face to face contact with clients from an Adult Services and Children's Services perspective, and also Public Health and Protection Services in working directly / inspecting businesses across the County Borough. The Chair wished to clarify his point that was focussed on the need for the Council to give on-going consideration to actions that would help reduce the Council's carbon footprint rather than the proposed increased to the mileage rate.

The Service Director asked if Members had any other comments in respect of budget strategy proposals and Committee Members fed back they had no further questions.

The Service Director – Finance & Improvement Services concluded the presentation by informing Members of the range of stakeholders being engaged as part of phase 2 of the consultation process and also set out the 2022/23 budget setting timetable. There were no further questions from Members and the Chair thanked the Service Director for the presentation.