

## PHASE 1 BUDGET CONSULTATION (2023/24)

((EXTRACT OF DRAFT MINUTES – SUBJECT TO APPROVAL BY THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE))

**RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNCIL OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE -  
Minutes of the hybrid meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on  
Tuesday, 29 November 2022 at 5.00 pm.**

County Borough Councillors – Overview and Scrutiny Committee Members in attendance  
in the Chamber:

Cllr G Hughes (Chair presiding)  
Cllr S Morgans  
Cllr M Ashford

County Borough Councillors in attendance virtually:

Cllr J Bonetto  
Cllr Sera Evans  
Cllr Sheryl Evans  
Cllr C Middle  
Cllr K Morgan  
Cllr G Warren  
Cllr G Williams

Officers in attendance:

P Mee – Group Director – Community and Children’s Services  
C Hanagan – Service Director – Democratic Services and Communication  
N Elliot – Director of Adult Services  
P Griffiths – Service Director – Finance and Improvement Services  
Democratic Services Officers: S Daniel, J Nicholls and J Crockett

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| Item ID    | 24365  |
| Item Title | Declarations of Interest                             |
| Summary    | None   |
|            | Cllr C Middle declared a personal interest in Item 6 |

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| Item ID    | 24366   |
| Item Title | Minutes   |
| Summary    | <b>RESOLVED:</b> The minutes of the meeting of the 7 November 2022 were |

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|  | approved as a true and accurate record of the meeting |
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| Item ID    | 24725   |
| Item Title | Consultation Links  |
| Summary    | The Principal Scrutiny Officer advised Members of the consultation links that were available to them for information. She advised if Members had any queries in relation to the consultation they could speak with the Democratic Services Team |

**Extract from the minutes**

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| Item ID    | 24719   |
| Item Title | 2023/24 Budget Consultation   |
| Summary    | <p>The Service Director Democratic Services and Communication introduced the report to Members to provide the opportunity for the Overview &amp; Scrutiny Committee to respond and contribute to the Council's phase 1 2023/24 Budget Consultation process.</p> <p>With the aid of a PowerPoint presentation, the Service Director Finance and Improvement Services provided Members with an overview of: the Council's 2022/23 financial position and outlook over the medium term; general approach for 2023/24 (in respect of the phase 1 budget consultation process); 2023/24 Budget Setting – key strategic building blocks; the Council's Priorities; and Council Tax Reduction Scheme (CTRS). The Service Director indicated that the overview of these areas intended to assist Members in formulating their feedback, in line with the Committee's Terms of Reference and being a consultee as part of the 2023/24 Budget Consultation process.</p> <p>Following conclusion of the presentation, Members were invited to provide their feedback on the key strategic building blocks, the Council's priorities and CTRS. Members fed back the following comments and observations:</p> <p><b>Schools</b></p> <p>The Service Director – Finance and Improvement Services requested feedback from the Committee on 'Do you think the Council should provide sufficient resources to fully cover increased pay and non-pay cost pressures in our schools?' and 'Do you think an efficiency saving should be built into the schools budget?'</p> <p>One Member asked what level of reserves schools were holding and fed back that Schools should be utilising reserves as part of their financial planning and contributing to the Council's budget setting arrangements.</p> <p>Another Member disagreed with this point as schools held different levels of reserves and the Council should take this into account in allocating an efficiency saving requirement. The Member added that children's education was hugely disrupted during the pandemic and any efficiency savings will</p> |

continue to impact on the ability of schools to support pupils catch up; therefore the Council should provide sufficient resources to cover costs in schools.

### **Social Care**

The Service Director requested feedback from the Committee on 'Do you think the Council should continue to prioritise social services as a key area for additional investment?'

Members were all in agreement that this area should be prioritised and the Council should continue to invest in this area as it supports the most vulnerable in our communities.

### **Fees and Charges**

The Service Director requested feedback from the Committee on 'Do you think the requirement for fees and charges to be reviewed individually and the continued need to take into account the impact on service users is a reasonable approach (and not apply an across-the-board increase in line with the 12 month CPI rate (as at Oct 22) of 11.1%?'

Members agreed that any changes to fees and charges should be considered on a service-by-service basis and a blanket approach should not be taken. Members added that the Council should ensure services remain affordable to individuals in the community which should, in turn, support an uptake in the use of specific services.

### **Service levels**

The Service Director requested feedback from the Committee on 'What service areas provided by the Council are important to you?' and 'Do you think the Council should consider changing the level of services for any of these and if so how? For example, reviewing the frequency that services are provided, or opening times, depending how often services are used?'

Members fed back that services for the vulnerable should be protected and any efficiencies should have minimum disruption to services.

### **Council Tax**

The Service Director requested feedback from the Committee on 'Do you think the Council should increase Council Tax next year by '0% to 3%', 'between 3% and 5%' or '5%+'?' and 'The level of Council Tax versus maintaining or reducing service levels?'

Due to the current cost of living crisis, Members did not want to see an increase above the '3% - 5%' as residents are already facing increases to food, energy, rent/mortgage and fuel costs. Members also fed back that

they were keen to keep any increases to council tax as low as possible and, as part of this, minimise reductions in service levels.

### **Efficiencies**

The Service Director requested feedback from the Committee on ‘Do you support the Council’s strategy on efficiencies?’, ‘Do you think we should continue to expect our managers to deliver more efficient services?’ and ‘Are there any specific areas where you think the Council could be more efficient / any examples of Council Services not being efficient?’

A Member asked if the Council is looking to sell some of its land and assets, taking into account their condition, to generate income. The Service Director fed back that the Council reviews its land and buildings on an on-going basis and plans and manages these arrangements via the Corporate Asset Management Plan to ensure the use of assets are optimised to support efficient service delivery. The Service Director added that where the on-going review process identifies options to dispose of assets, in line with service delivery requirements, the Council will progress such opportunities.

Another Member agreed with the Council strategy on efficiencies and fed back that the Council should continue to rely on its expert managers to be innovative and effective and review how we can do things better.

### **Council Reserves**

The Service Director requested feedback from the Committee on ‘Do you think the Council should continue with its strategy around the management of reserves?’

The Committee agreed that it is important to keep reserves at an adequate level, especially during the current very challenging and volatile financial environment. Another Member fed back that there should be more information given to the public on how the Council uses its reserves as the public have an expectation that reserves should be used during times of austerity.

### **Council Priorities**

The Service Director requested feedback from the Committee on ‘Do you think the Council should focus on the five key areas of digitisation, commercialisation, early intervention and prevention, Independence and Efficient and Effective Organisation to maximise resources and deliver improved services?’

Members agreed with the approach to the Council’s priorities and fed back that leading the way on digitalisation will help support better outcomes for our residents.

## **Council Tax Reduction Scheme**

The Service Director requested feedback from the Committee on the following:

Extended Payments – ‘Do you think that 4 weeks is a reasonable period to continue paying Council Tax Reduction when someone returns to work?’

Members agreed that a 4-week period is adequate and should be retained as this provides individuals with support as they return to work.

War disablement – ‘Do you think that it is reasonable for the Council to continue to totally exclude War Disablement and War Widow’s Pensions income when assessing entitlement to CTR Scheme?’

Members supported the exclusion of the whole amount of War Disablement Pensions and War Widow’s Pensions when calculating Council Tax Reduction Scheme entitlement.

Backdating claims – ‘Do you think that 6 months is a reasonable period to backdate claims for working age and pensioners?’

Members agreed that the backdated claim period of 6 months was adequate and should be retained.

### **RESOLVED:**

1. Members provided feedback to the Council’s Phase 1 2023/24 Budget Consultation process.
2. Authorise the Service Director Democratic Services and Communication to formulate a response on behalf of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to the Council’s Phase 1 2023/24 Budget Consultation process.