

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE ECONOMY, RESIDENTS AND COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD AT BY TEAMS ON MONDAY, 31 JANUARY 2022

PRESENT: County Councillor M J Dorrance (Chair)
County Councillors D Selby, J Charlton, L Corfield, D Evans, G Jones, D Jones-Poston, J Pugh and J Wilkinson

Cabinet Portfolio Holders In Attendance: County Councillors R Harris (Leader), P Davies (Portfolio Holder for Education and Property), M Alexander (Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care and Welsh Language), R Powell (Portfolio Holder for Young People and Culture), A Davies (Portfolio Holder for Finance and Transport), B Baynham (Portfolio Holder for Corporate Governance, and Regulatory Services), H Hulme (Portfolio Holder for Environment).

Officers: Matthew Perry (Head of Highways, Transport and Recycling), Gwilym Davies (Head of Property, Planning and Public Protection), Nina Davies (Head of Housing and Community Development), Emma Palmer (Head of Transformation and Communications), Clive Pinney (Head of Legal and Democratic Services), Diane Reynolds (Head of Economy and Digital Services), Jane Thomas (Head of Finance), Wyn Richards (Scrutiny Manager and Head of Democratic Services), Alison Bulman (Executive Director - People and Organisational Development), Gemma Gabriel (Professional Lead Human Resources Management and Development) and Marie James (Finance Manager).

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from County Councillors K Roberts-Jones and K Lewis and from County Councillor K Curry (other Council business).

2. DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST

There were no disclosures of interest by Members relating to items to be considered at the meeting.

3. DECLARATION OF PARTY WHIPS

The Committee did not receive any disclosures of prohibited party whips which a Member has been given in relation to the meeting in accordance with Section 78(3) of the Local Government Measure 2011.

4. DRAFT 2022 - 23 BUDGET

Documents Considered:

- A copy of the Cabinet report to provide the overall context for the budget setting process
- A copy of the Mid Term Financial Strategy and Finance Resource Model (**Appendices A and B**)
- A copy of Services' cost reduction proposals (**Appendix C**)
- A copy of the Fees and Charges Report which provides an overview to Service proposals for income generation. (**Appendices D and E**)
- A copy of the Capital Strategy and the Treasury Management Strategy. (**Appendix F**)

- A copy of the Reserves Policy (**Appendix G**)
- A copy of the Budget Survey (**Appendix H**)
- Individual Impact Assessments relating to the proposals under (iii) above (**Appendix I**) and the Council wide Impact Assessment (**Appendix J**)

Issues Discussed:

General:

- Draft report has been considered and accepted by the Cabinet.
- The net revenue expenditure is forecast to increase to over £300m with an additional expenditure of £22m most of which is funded from the additional Welsh Government settlement.
- The Council has received a better settlement than expected but it does come with strings attached e.g. the real living wage element. Therefore, it is a complicated settlement this time.
- To balance the budget there needs to be a 3.9% increase in Council tax, as well as cost reductions and additional revenue from Welsh Government will assist balance the budget.
- The budget report sets out the Section 151 Officer's opinion about the robustness of the budget.

Transformation and Communications:

Question	Response
<p>Impact Assessment associated with the proposals in the budget – the proposal is ranked as poor in the Impact Assessment. The mitigation action suggests that this would move to good. However, the mitigation is only a rewrite of the assessment as to why this was ranked as poor (less people having face to face services and having to self serve). Can we have some more narrative around this please.</p> <p>The format of Impact Assessments has greatly improved this year which is to be welcomed.</p>	<p>The savings have already been made and the restructuring undertaken. There is assurance that the Service can make the full year saving in next year's budget. The Service has worked with other services to look at digitising the integrated business plans. This was undertaken manually previously but improvements have been made to move towards digitisation of the plans, although not completed as yet, to use technology to take out some of the more onerous tasks which has led to the efficiency. The level of digitisation of Impact Assessments means you can look at the cumulative impacts across services which is useful when you look at budgets.</p>
<p>In terms of self serve understand the need for this from services. However, we need to be mindful that not everyone will like a self serve process and there are those who do not have online facilities such as the elderly.</p>	<p>The focus here is on internal services only rather than the public as a corporate support service so the effect would be on other internal services. However, the comments about the public and the wider digital development are noted and we need to make services accessible to all. Corporate Services still need to make</p>

	savings as well to reduce cuts to front line services so have to make efficiencies as well .
How much impact or influence does feedback from the public have on the development of services.	In terms of the Corporate Improvement Plan this is mainly developed through the well-being and population assessments. We have recently undertaken this exercise and themes will come from that assessment. We do consider what the public say and look at this with Members when developing the next version of the corporate plan. We are engaging with the public throughout the year and will do this on a quarterly basis moving forwards as part of the Council's quarterly reporting. As part of the assurance framework, we need to know what people think about services and also look at complaints and compliments as part of double loop learning so we are in a position of continual improvement. In this way Services can make in year adjustments to services.

Comment:

- Under 5C the Impact Assessment does not provide assurance as meeting demand is subject to having adequate resources which is not very robust. Can this be tightened up to give greater assurance.

Finance:

Question	Response
Travel savings – is this for the service area only or the Council as a whole. How did you model the saving £20k. Is this ambitious enough or will it be difficult to achieve.	This is just for the service area. The overall travel budget for the service areas is currently £36.5k. Travel has significantly reduced over the past few years. However, as we move back to a business as usual model, whilst there could be a reduction in the level of travel some of the services meet face to face with the public so some travel needs to be factored in. Also, some staff are undertaking professional training so there will be an element of travel for college attendance. The approach taken is that this gives us a saving of over 50% so it is not over or under ambitious, but a good starting point.

Housing and Community Development:

Question	Response
<p>Housing Revenue Account (HRA) – why has the reserve reduced so much. What are the policy unit savings.</p> <p>We are undertaking a major change in the repairs and maintenance service by bringing HOWPS back in house and there are costs associated with this. What reserves are built into the budget to cover any unforeseen costs over the next year.</p>	<p>In terms of HRA reserves, it is never the intention to carry significant levels of reserves. It has been higher over last few years due to slippage and underspends but the aim is to have a reserve of around £1m. With the new builds programme the reserve is being used to fund the new builds rather than borrowing money and the Service aims to keep borrowing costs as low as possible by reducing the HRA reserve back to normal levels.</p> <p>The policy unit savings relate to third party spend e.g. goods and services or consultancy work. The aim is to reduce that by £37k per year.</p> <p>HOWPS – the transition costs are being funded from the spend to save reserve to an agreed level (£435k). When the transition is complete it is expected that savings will be made and any savings will be used to repay the spend to save reserve over future years. If the costs increased above the agreed level an additional request would need to be made to increase the contribution from the spend to save reserve.</p>
<p>Are current tenants paying to cover costs for future tenants</p>	<p>The HRA is to cover costs for existing and new properties. That is what the HRA does.</p>
<p>The transfer of HOWPS back into Housing is not a way of making savings. We also cannot guarantee in year one that there will be a saving.</p>	<p>The cost of managing HOWPS externally will not need to be covered in future. The aim is to create a better service.</p> <p>The driver behind this is not the delivery of savings. There is a potential that savings could be made in future following the transition. Finance will need to comment on the additional risks and how this is managed within Finance.</p>
<p>Arts and Cultural Services. Taking into account the Impact Assessment for the arts cost reductions – how can</p>	<p>The cost reductions have been over the last three years so organisations have had notice of the changes.</p>

<p>we justify what are small cuts. The overall assessment states that funding cuts may lead to a reduction in provision and benefits of activities. Organisations such as Theatr Hafren worry they may not be able to survive. Theatr Hafren use much of this money as seed funding to attract further funding and they question whether they can continue their cultural contracts with Welsh Government and the Arts Council Wales funding agreement. Considering the impact assessment how can this be justified.</p> <p>We have to accept that we are a very rural county and whilst we cannot support everything these are the four largest organisations in Powys. If they fail it will have a knock-on effect on other arts groups in the county. We therefore need to take greater heed of the impact assessment.</p>	<p>There are between 119 and 143 arts organisations in Powys which are not supported by Powys but have survived, by accessing other funding. It is a significant point about matched funding from Arts Council Wales and the Council does need to continue to support these organisations. There are other sources of funding available such as covid recovery funding for which arts organisations have been able to apply. Those that could not be granted the additional support have been signposted by the Council to other funding sources. Whilst each arts organisation is different, some organisations have prospered during this time. We will do all we can to support organisations such as Theatr Hafren they are independent organisations. There is funding also from health to invest in public health initiatives and these projects will commission work from arts organisations.</p>
<p>There are many organisations that Powys does not fund, and this is the argument behind this cost reduction. Why have you taken that approach and taken a more targeted approach rather than cease funding to all.</p>	<p>The point was around equity and even with Arts Council Wales funding offered to all. Was not trying to argue for the cost reductions, merely trying to emphasise that there are many arts organisations in Powys that are independent or have accessed other means of finance and we need to be mindful of that and the fact that there are some large arts organisations in Powys not supported by the Council. Whatever we do to support arts organisations we need to have an universal approach for all.</p>
<p>In relation to Wyeside, cannot emphasise enough the impact these cuts have had over the three years. Whilst that have had the benefit of Covid funding over the last two years, they have still had to close. Understand that these businesses need to be sustainable. However, these are more than just businesses, often the centre of communities. The major concern is that these cuts are not fulfilling their needs and organisations are not being listened</p>	<p>Evaluation has been difficult in the last two years and Covid has affected the commissioning process. There are other arts venues in rural communities who are adjusting and managing to continue or are self sufficient.</p> <p>In relation to Powys covid funding, there were four arts projects that were successful (£25k), and one was not but was signposted elsewhere. The arts officer is continually supporting and signposting arts</p>

<p>to. How can we justify the cuts this year. Have these cuts been evaluated and what has that shown so far and what is the likely impact going to be on these organisations. What is the risk to these cuts. How are we making sure we do not put these organisations into a position where they have to close.</p>	<p>venues to other sources of support and funding. A number of arts venues last year which the Council supports were not expecting any funding and have been happy to receive funding. The meeting next week is looking at alternative means of support. An Arts Council Wales investment review is to be undertaken in April 2023, which has been delayed for a year.</p>
<p>The Impact Assessment is looking at the impact of cutting funding for these particular organisations. There has been no assurance provided that this has been evaluated or consideration of the risk and impact.</p>	<p>There are always risks to cost reductions. Will always do what we can to support these organisation with whatever resources we can and using links with others such as public health. There are other forms of support out there. We need to look at how arts and culture has a place in supporting communities.</p>
<p>Libraries and proposal to reduce the budget to purchase new books. The current library book fund is already below what is expected by Welsh Government. What action could be undertaken by Welsh Government and could it result in further budget implications. The Impact Assessment says no impact on the Welsh Language, but if there is an overall reduction in books purchased this could result in an impact on the number of Welsh Language books purchased and consequently the Welsh Language.</p>	<p>We are reviewed annually by Welsh Government. In terms of books purchased, will look at need on an all Powys basis. The assurance given to the Portfolio Holder is that books will be selected dependent on demand. The Welsh Public Library Standards assessment report noted that the expenditure on materials was low but this has not appeared to have affected the delivery of effective services. The materials budget is below the median in Wales and we are not aware of any likely action to be taken against Powys. The cost reduction is a £5k reduction in a budget of just under £180k. The Council has continued to invest in Welsh Language books. Stock selection will be carefully considered to ensure a range of books for customers. Customers have had an increased digital access throughout covid with access to research, ancestry.com, find my past etc. The non book offer has also been expanded which is why this proposal is being put forward.</p>
<p>Freedom Leisure contract. The annual fee reduces, and this reduction in fees was arranged before</p>	<p>The Council meets regularly with Freedom as part of the quarterly performance reviews. They are held</p>

<p>the pandemic. Can I have an assurance that with the meetings taking place that the resulting impact does not put leisure centres at risk.</p>	<p>to account as the service is commissioned. We have been working closely with Freedom Leisure during the pandemic and have secured additional funding for them through the Welsh Government's hardship funding to support them whilst income has been restricted. We will continue communication and support into recovery.</p>
<p>The Strand Hall is owned and run by Builth Wells Town Council. Regarding the funding being removed from arts centres, what we are trying to do is closing these arts centres or are we going to prop them up when they start failing. What is the long term view towards the arts centres.</p>	<p>All arts centres are different, but there are other arts communities in Powys. In term of long term aspects we are working with them in terms of public health and how culture and the arts can support other activities. We do own Theatr Brycheiniog and the funding provided was capital funding. The reductions were planned three years ago. We also need to be mindful of wider arts communities. We did not get the city of culture bid this time but we should bid for that again in future. We are in partnership with these organisations and Powys Health and Public Health. This is about collaboration with these organisations long term as well as a City of Culture bid and bring more funding into Powys as a whole.</p>
<p>The Portfolio Holder did respond previously that the cuts should not come as a surprise to organisations. The cultural sector has suffered due to covid which did not exist three years ago. How did this factor into the thinking about continuing these proposals.</p>	<p>The funding is commissioning funding and most of it is about community work and in the past two years it has been difficult to fulfil all those aims. Long term it is about working with arts organisations. Covid will not go away. People have found ingenious ways of delivering their arts and culture offer. We will continue to support these organisations with the resources available.</p>
<p>What do we spend in total on arts and culture working with all the different organisations in Powys.</p>	<p>The remaining arts budget will be £131,756k which supports one officer post, rural touring schemes and an arts commissioning budget. The council is supporting with advice and guidance, joint partnership working with organisations moving forward.</p>
<p>This does not seem like a lot of money for a sector that adds so much</p>	<p>Any cuts are difficult, but this is a non statutory service and when asked to</p>

<p>added value to economies and well-being. This feels like a very small amount and the impact assessment acknowledges that the impact on the economy is poor, and even after mitigation it is not clear what the impact on the economy will be. As Head of Service does that worry you.</p>	<p>make cuts to statutory services it is appropriate to look at all options. This has been in the planning for three years and time has been given to organisations to adjust to the changes in grant funding. Covid has provided opportunities for organisations to speed up changes to delivery such as a move to a digital delivery.</p>
<p>When you look at the Council's vision it is clear that the Council is not in the arts and culture business. The venue grants are disappearing and the remainder of the funding is for a post. It would be difficult to be a city of culture when we do not invest anything in arts and culture.</p>	<p>Funding a person is essential linking with other organisations and will bring other opportunities. In terms of Arts Council Wales funding there will always be an anticipation that local authorities will fund the arts and it is important where and how we invest the Council's matched funding. Arts and culture will need to be part of the Council's vision, it is how it is supported collaboratively which will be important.</p>

Councillors Gareth Jones and David Selby disclosed a personal and non-prejudicial interest as a member of the governing body of Theatr Hafren, appointed by the County Council.

County Councillor Matthew Dorrance declared a personal and non prejudicial interest as a member of the governing body of Neath Port Talbot College appointed by the County Council.

Digital Services:

Question	Response
<p>How is the service doing on getting faster broadband rolled out to local communities.</p>	<p>This is part of the digital strategy. We have supported a local broadband officer. We have been successful in getting local broadband funding to support two broadband officers and also to work on 13 projects to connect to hard to reach properties and how we can look at connectivity in a different way and the in line benefits of connecting to hard to reach properties and who else in connected as well. This should also assist in getting strong evidence to support a bid under the growth deal by learning from the current funding. By connecting the 13 properties it would involve connecting 150 properties along the line which would include some business districts.</p>

<p>In the budget survey that was undertaken the public indicated that it was supportive of delivering on digital options but in the text underneath people are clear that they still want to have face to face options to speak to the Council. How is this being balanced.</p>	<p>If you contact the Council there is an option to use an automated service or to speak to a person. There is a need to strike the balance in offering services and having someone available that the public can speak to. When offices reopen receptions will be open again.</p>
<p>Are we monitoring digital connections for staff who are working from home so that people can contact them. Also is connectivity appropriate in all our buildings. Is there work being done to improve connectivity in buildings.</p>	<p>Unaware of any issues with connectivity at Ladywell House. Staff access calls through Teams. Staff can also go into offices if they have connection issues.</p> <p>Libraries have good connections as well and people have used libraries to access services face to face.</p> <p>In terms of telephone connectivity, the Council has moved from Skype for business to Teams so it is a quicker connection and works better for staff at home. We have had issues with staff connecting from home but they have been able to work in offices. We have also supported staff with mobile connectivity when they are out and about.</p> <p>The authority is also looking at its network traffic to make things work more effectively with lower level broadband speeds. We have been working with communities on broadband connectivity.</p>
<p>How do we monitor staff who are working at home.</p>	<p>Line managers are in contact with staff on a regular basis, and undertake supervision. Staff are contactable longer than they would be working regular hours in the office, both earlier and later.</p>

Legal and Democratic Services:

Question	Response
<p>Member Development and Member Support. There been a strategic overview of the way Democratic Services are delivered. Specifically in respect of support for scrutiny committees, a recent Audit Wales report requested that the Council strengthens the support for scrutiny and provide additional resources, and this cannot be achieved with the</p>	<p>The Council could save more on Member travel. The current budget is £51k, so we are taking about a quarter out. We will look at this again next year after new membership has started and we know how individuals want to work as we did not want to remove too much and then have to reinstate or increase it.</p>

<p>proposed changes detailed in the report. Member Travel budget – this saving is not very ambitious. Would like to have seen more than the £10k. How much more can we save on travel. What risks and threats are put on scrutiny committees by the level of support proposed in the document.</p>	<p>In terms of Scrutiny committees, accept the need to provide additional resource. The aim is to bring in additional support from Emma Palmer's team in relation to data as well as providing additional administrative support across the service including Scrutiny and Member Support.</p>
<p>This scrutiny committee has said that it believes that it and Member Support are under resourced and supported. How do you think the proposals will meet what is needed.</p>	<p>The proposals are that there will be an additional member of staff to help across services as well as input from Emma Palmer's service to support scrutiny. The Portfolio Holder indicated she would be happy to discuss further suggestions and issues with Members.</p>
<p>Concerned that the proposal will not resolve what has been highlighted by the audit report as the current support is inadequate. This is especially important for new Members when they start. Not yet reassured that the required level of support will be there for the new intake of Members in May.</p>	<p>An induction programme is being prepared for May onwards and to prepare new members on how they will work. Papers and programmes are being developed for May. ICT support has been realigned and teething problems sorted out. The Portfolio Holder was assured that there will be adequate induction and Member support from May.</p>
<p>My view is there is no Member support. In discussing the restructuring is this referring to the restructuring from two years ago which was never completed. Is this a new restructuring or the one which was not completed.</p>	<p>Covid delayed the restructuring work. This is about the scrutiny reorganisation, and things has changed and the reorganisation will not be as was first proposed two years ago. This is an amended version of the original proposals. It is hoped there will be more support than previously. The additional administrative officer will cover all areas and will provide some additional support to Members. The structure will be kept under constant review.</p>

Workforce and Organisational Development:

Question	Response
<p>The implication of DBS charging on schools as schools are already under pressure to deliver a balanced budget. Are schools aware of the</p>	<p>Appreciate that there may be concern about this. Currently all DBS check costs come under the Workforce and OD Service, and are now being</p>

<p>proposal and does it include DBS charges for Members who are LEA governors on governing bodies.</p>	<p>transferred to Education. There has been discussion with schools and the Education Service. Accept that it will be an additional pressure for the for Education Service.</p>
<p>Are headteachers aware that this cost will be coming from their budgets as yet. What about LEA Governors is this charged to the schools. This is not a saving, its taking a cost from one service and recharging it back to another.</p>	<p>This has been discussed at the schools budget forum last week. The fee is only the 3rd party fee, which is the cost of the check rather than any administrative costs. The intention that all the costs of DBS checks undertaken by schools will be recharged back to schools.</p>
<p>Health and Safety – school charges – what are the implications for schools. Are schools aware of this as yet as consultation is due to take place. What happens if headteachers decide to contract their own health and safety advice. How will this be monitored.</p>	<p>There was a discussion with the schools budget forum about this as well last week. There is nothing stopping schools sourcing their own health and safety advice from anywhere. There is a potential that it could leave the authority with some concerns. There is work ongoing in relation to this. This is a notional fee for all schools, and if implemented there would be a need to look at a model for schools i.e. a model for the service used but this does not provide a certainty on cost, or a notional sum of just over £500 per school. Should schools source Health and Safety advice from elsewhere the authority would need to be assured that the advice provided is what is required to provide safe systems of work.</p>
<p>Is schools outsourced the advice, would it have a resource implication. Is that achievable within the savings.</p>	<p>Yes potentially as the authority would need to put some monitoring arrangements in place as the authority would remain liable for health and safety elements. That depends on how many schools outsource their advice and it depends on a number of variables.</p>

Property, Planning and Public Protection:

Question	Response
<p>Income from fees and charges – increase in charges for all Services is zero or minimal. Because of the static increase in income will there be any</p>	<p>All charges were reviewed, and it was felt it appropriate not to increase many of the charges and in some cases reduce them. As an example</p>

<p>significant challenges to service delivery e.g. planning have had staffing issues with a turnover of staff in the past year, will the fees have any impact on that.</p> <p>Council buildings – Ladywell House. The second floor is currently empty. What is the plan for underused buildings to generate income.</p>	<p>cemetery fees in Powys are one of the highest in Wales and therefore it was not appropriate to increase it. With the budget proposed it was felt that the service can be maintained without cuts to the service.</p> <p>Planning – there has been a reduction in large applications currently which has reduced income to authority as well as workload. The Service is progressing applications and hopefully will be better place within next 12 months with the workforce which is adequate.</p> <p>With regard to fees, planning fees are set by Welsh Government and a further review is being undertaken to move planning to become a full cost recovery service. Other fees are set by other bodies.</p> <p>In relation to staffing levels, the difficulty was getting people to apply for jobs but this has now improved. Income levels will need to be kept under review especially due to reductions in large applications.</p> <p>The backlog of applications is reducing (planning and planning enforcement) but will take a number of months to work through, but this will also require a stable workforce.</p> <p>New ways of working as Covid has affected everyone. The Council does receive a significant rental income and service charges in relation to Ladywell House. Receipts and income from buildings despite being in the middle of a pandemic are doing quite well. There is a high level of building occupancy and returns are good. Further information can be provided. An asset review is also underway to ensure the best use of buildings.</p>
<p>In relation to the 2nd Floor in Ladywell House. Who is going to occupy this space if we are not going to use it ourselves.</p>	<p>Until last week the work from home message which was compulsory meant that buildings were empty. The 2021-22 rental income shows that all the spaces were occupied by tenants. 2nd Floor suite is the Council's space and officers would have been working</p>

	<p>out of that space. This is also part of the asset review. Ladywell House is an asset to the Council. What is set as incomes in the budget is appropriate based on occupancy rates during Covid.</p>
<p>Can Members have figures of occupancy rates and what is available for service charges and rental income.</p>	<p>Yes, will look at what can be provided to Members. ACTION – information to be provided to Members.</p>
<p>County Farms Estate – In the capital programme and strategy the amount allocated is small for the next 3 years. What is the ambition and what will the county farms estate look like in 5 to 10 years' time. The document implies that the investment is to get parts of the estate ready for sale rather than encourage new farmers.</p>	<p>The county farms estate is still quite large despite smaller properties and land having been sold off in the past few years. The capital investment is partly for some of the houses, and some investment in buildings. The Council is also looking at farms which could be converted i.e. sell the land and keep the house or sell them with planning permission which could generate further income. This is about getting planning permissions for barns which can be converted. Hopefully, farms can be used for other purposes such as an energy stream under the Mid Wales Growth Deal, or growing our own timber. Whilst the holdings are reasonably small they are a start in farming which would be difficult to get otherwise. There are three types of tenancies, lifetime (decreasing numbers), retirement (up to 65) but most are on farm business tenancies (8 to 10 year tenancies). There is a county farms project board chaired by Gwilym Davies. The Leader was happy to speak to the Committee.</p>
<p>Could there be reassurance, as there are corporate companies buying farms for carbon offsetting. What is the Council's policy about controlling who might purchase these farms and the basis on which they are purchased.</p>	<p>Would be very much against selling farms for this purpose. However, there will be sales in the private sector. The Council has no plans to sell farms wholesale, only parcels of land. Having tenants can also devalue the value of a farm if the tenant transfers to the new owner. Would prefer to buy more farms in South Powys.</p>

Highways, Transport and Recycling:

Question	Response
<p>Have any of the cuts which Highways have endured impact the fabric of the highway other than the streetlighting cuts. The existing budget allows the maintenance of the highway in its current state without improvements. Does the budget allow any improvements to the highway. What funding bids are being put forward under the Levelling up funding.</p>	<p>The Council has been investing in the road infrastructure over past few years. Only 3.9% of class 1 roads are deemed in a poor condition, and 5.3% of class 2 roads. Over the past 12 months £6.5m has been invested. The Portfolio Holder was therefore confident that the Service was putting forward a strong capital programme to continue road improvements. The Council does have a definitive road improvement programme. Bids are ready to be submitted for active travel and also for the next levelling up fund application at around £3.5m which includes some bridging infrastructures. Some active travel projects are also ready to be submitted. Officers are also looking at any available funding opportunities.</p>
<p>The economic prosperity of Powys and ambitions post covid are dependent on a good highway infrastructure to help deliver that. Will the current budget allow for improvement as well as sustaining the current infrastructure.</p>	<p>There are no cuts for highways save for street lighting through energy efficient lighting. The highways network is receiving about £6.5m investment each year as part of the capital programme. There was a slight improvement last year on Class A, B and C roads. The issue moving forward is the cost of materials and whether as a result we can undertake as much work as previously, but the Service has secured £0.5m pressure funding in relation to materials to mitigate this. One area of budget that need to be reviewed is the funding for bridges. Through the levelling up funding the Council is bidding for £4.8m for rights of way for bridges, £3.5m for active travel, and £5.4m for resurfacing.</p>
<p>In terms of countryside services there is a huge network of footpaths and byways with a depleted service with insufficient numbers of staff to maintain let alone improve the footpath network. Do we need to devote more resources to this to allow people to visit and explore Powys.</p>	<p>We are mindful of the need for a greater focus on the countryside and public rights of way as part of the economic recovery from Covid. Officers are looking at the budget to make sure it is appropriate and hopefully this year's budget of £500k will make progress into the work that needs to be done. We are making sure that countryside services is not being hit in terms of</p>

	<p>the rights of way capital schemes. The Service is focussing this year on income generation rather than cutting services and also working closely with Powys Local Access Forum.</p>
<p>Is there a clear idea what the budget should be for highways. How much is needed every year to maintain and improve the highways.</p>	<p>We have a ten year forward plan in the Service. There is confidence that the current budget will see an improvement not a decline.</p>
<p>Looking at the Impact Assessment and the proposed savings could you provide some background on highway designs savings of £50k. At which recycle bring sites are bins to be removed. If this is successful is there an ambition to increase this figure going forward.</p>	<p>Highways engineering design income – an external service can be provided by the engineering design team, which will generate additional income.</p> <p>Yes definitely and the same with street works income as well. With street works income, more utility companies are wanting street closures which generates an income for the Council. Also hoping to develop the engineering design team and the income they could generate in future.</p> <p>There are 35 bring sites across the county. The intention is to remove paper and glass bins from these sites and move this to kerbside collection. However, bins for cardboard will remain.</p>
<p>Where will casual visitors and tourists be able to put their recyclables as they have access to bins currently in car parks, but if this is removed they will not have access to a kerbside collection. Has there been any consultation with Town and Community Councils.</p> <p>The same applies where we provide overnight parking at car parks but do not provide recycling. Good to hear officers commenting about the importance of income generation rather than cutting services.</p>	<p>In terms of visitors hopefully they would take their recyclables home with them and recycle them there. For campers, there is going to be a new requirement where recycling bins will need to be available on campsites.</p> <p>This can be reviewed.</p>

Discussion / Debate:

- Arts and Culture needs to be highlighted. The Portfolio Holder feel there are other ways of supporting venues which Members may not agree with. Concern about properly resource the service when there is ambition for cultural services, advance social mobility, the impact on wellbeing.

- Need to assess what is in the Impact Assessment about arts and culture. Feels like the negatives have been ignored and needs to be explored further.
- There is a recurring theme that there is an ambition by the Council to regenerate Powys and develop the economy and our inability to invest in it which is an area of concern.
- We want to encourage people to come to Powys and look after them whilst they are here.
- The Impact Assessments have improved, but taking the arts one as an example, when the impact is poor, we expect more than a sentence to explain it as it could have other impacts elsewhere. We are still working in silos e.g. the impact on other services such as on education is not reflected, and cuts in one service could mean more needing to be spent elsewhere in the Council. Need as a Council to overcome this.
- HOWPS is not about saving money and it could be a mistake to position it in this way as a spend to save.
- Legal and Democratic Services – concern about Member and Scrutiny Support. The Committee continues to believe this is under-resourced.
- This is not about Members' services, it is about support to Members working with their communities. Additional support especially for scrutiny committees is required. In May there may be new candidates who might be concerned about how they will be supported if elected especially people with disabilities who may need additional support. We need to stress to candidates that they will get support that they need and this budget puts this at risk. The Committee felt that what was there currently in terms of support is not enough.
- DBS checks – this is just moving the cost to another part of the Council and is not a direct saving. It is moving the pressure to another service.
- Concern about empty offices in buildings. It is good that these buildings generate an income. However, if we are not going to use the buildings ourselves, we should use them for income generation.
- There is an inability to improve our highways network but we are in the position of merely sustaining them. There is also a concern about the rising costs of materials which could mean a deterioration of the network unless there is an improved budget.
- Pleased to hear the focus by officers on income generation as opposed to cutting services.

Outcomes:

Scrutiny made the following observations:

Housing and Community Development:

- HOWPS – Whilst it was understood that the aim of bringing HOWPS back in house was not a cost saving but an improvement in service, the Committee expressed concern that whilst there was emphasis on the potential saving following transition, this could not be guaranteed, especially in the first years following transition. It was not clear whether sufficient budget is held for any potential extra cost with the project.
- Arts and Cultural Services:
- Whilst the Portfolio Holder suggested that there are other ways of supporting arts and culture venues, the Committee was of the view that arts and culture

needed to be properly supported by the Council, which it was not assured was currently the case.

- The Committee is of the view that this sector adds value to the Powys economy as they are more than just businesses, and the current proposal creates risk in this regard especially in relation to their ability to continue contracts with Welsh Government and the Arts Council and the potential knock on impact on smaller organisations should they close.
- The Committee also suggested that the previous funding reductions to arts and culture venues should be evaluated to gauge the long term impact as well as the potential impact on the Council's vision. Covid will have had an additional detrimental impact but this is not reflected in the proposals.
- The Committee whilst noting that the quality of Impact assessments had generally improved, expressed concern that the Impact Assessments for Arts and Culture:
 - required further review as the negative impacts had been overlooked in the final assessment
 - reflected silo-working within the Council and that the impact on other services by the proposed cost savings had not been taken into account
 - where there was a poor / negative impact required further detail to explain the context and impact

Legal and Democratic Services:

- The Committee was not assured that the proposal:
 - would secure the improved resourcing of Member Support and support for the Scrutiny Committees as highlighted in the Audit Wales review of Scrutiny in Powys.
 - would provide adequate resources to support new Members when they were appointed in May, some of whom may have disabilities and special support requirements.

Workforce and Organisational Development:

- The Committee expressed concern that the cost reductions for DBS checks and Health and Safety are not true cost reductions, as it merely moves the cost and pressure to another service.

Property, Planning and Public Protection:

- The Committee was reassured that the Council is wherever possible seeking to maximise income from its buildings.
- The Committee commented that if the Council was not going to utilise buildings or areas within buildings itself due to revised ways of working for staff or other reasons, that those areas be considered for income generation at the earliest opportunity.
- The Committee was assured that there was a long term vision for the County Farms Estate as set out by the Portfolio Holder.

Highways, Transport and Recycling:

- The Committee was reassured that the current budget provided would assist the Service in improving rather than maintaining the highway network.
- However, the Committee expressed concern that the rising costs of materials and the possible reduction in the Council's ability to undertake as much

improvement work as it hoped, could put the Council back in a position of maintaining rather than improving the highway network.

- The Committee expressed concern about the removal of paper and glass recycling from bring sites and asked for this to be reviewed particularly in terms of impacts on tourists and where overnight parking was allowed in Powys car parks.

General:

- The Committee commented that whilst in all services there was a general ambition to regenerate Powys, there was a lack of ambition to invest in that regeneration.
- The Committee believes that the proposals do not provide enough assurance that the budget will enable / resource the Council to deliver on its Vision 2025 – Corporate Improvement Plan.

Scrutiny's Recommendations to Cabinet:

- 1 that the Council should review the proposed cuts to the arts and cultural sector in Powys and provide better financial support to this sector.**
- 2 that Impact Assessment should contain better information on impacts on other services as well as greater detail where there was a poor or negative impact.**
- 3. that the Legal and Democratic Services' cost reduction / cut proposal be reviewed as in the Committee's view the proposal will not adequately resource the service or enable an improvement in Members' and Scrutiny Committee support as the Council continues its improvement journey.**
- 4. that the removal of paper and glass from bring sites should be reviewed in terms of its impact on tourism and where car parks are used for overnight parking**

County Councillor M J Dorrance (Chair)