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Finance Panel – 28 September 2020

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE FINANCE PANEL HELD AT TEAMS LIVE ON MONDAY, 28 SEPTEMBER 2020

PRESENT

Mr J Brautigam (Chair), County Councillors JG Morris, A W Davies, J Gibson-Watt, J Pugh, P Roberts, E Vaughan, D A Thomas, R G Thomas and G I S Williams

Officers: Jane Thomas, Head of Finance and Clive Pinney, Head of Legal and Democratic Services

1.	APOLOGIES
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An apology for absence was received from County Councillor M Dorrance.

2.	NOTES
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Documents:

- Notes of the last meeting held on 30 July 2020

Outcomes:

- **The notes were received**

3.	RECOVERY PLANNING
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Documents:

- Report of the Leader

Discussion:

- The Authority had invoked business continuity in March 2020 in response to the significant challenges of the Covid 19 pandemic
- The following principles informed the Council response – responding to COVID 19; keeping our communities safe and resilient and Running the Council.
- The report establishes the principles and planning assumption to achieve key goals including:
 - the delivery of a balanced budget for 2020/21
 - clear integrated planning objectives and the actions needed to take us through to March 2021
 - Effective Budget Planning for 2021/22
 - Integrated business plans adapted to embrace the opportunities presented by the pandemic
 - A Corporate Improvement Plan updated with key transformation and improvement objectives through to March 2025
- Finance Panel should consider the planning arrangements that have been put in place to develop next year's budget.
- Service budgets are being reviewed – Heads of Service are to provide a position statement regarding progress against objectives and recovery work needed. Revised IBPs are to be completed by 30 October 2020.

- The WLGA are collecting information across Authorities in Wales via a survey to inform the budget discussions with Welsh Government, the results of the survey will be shared with Members as part of the budget process
- The wider economic impact on households and businesses will need to be considered
- It was noted that the Autumn Statement had been cancelled – what contingencies are in place for the late setting of the Budget? The Head of Finance reported that a provisional settlement was expected in December and the final settlement in March. Fortnightly meetings of the Welsh Treasurers are being held and it was hoped there would be more information shortly. A number of scenarios are being planned for and the MTFS is being reviewed.
- The Chair questioned whether the service had sufficient capacity to complete the work. The Head of Finance reported that she had the same resources available but that there was considerable pressure on the service to submit the ongoing monthly hardship returns to Welsh Government, continual monitoring of the financial position, deliver business critical activity whilst continuing to support service areas.
- The Panel noted that the financial situation was unclear – there had been support from the Hardship Fund and this was to continue for the remainder of the year. Indications of support for next year were not yet forthcoming. The duration of the pandemic will also have an effect. There could also be a potentially significant impact on NNDR
- The MTFS has been predicated on a number of scenarios from a worst case of -2% in the settlement from Welsh Government, no change in funding (flat cash) through to +2%. Factors such as inflation, pay awards and service pressures are also included.
- The Panel also questioned whether new ways of working would become the norm without consultation with service users or provision of impact assessments. It was confirmed that these must be provided to inform the decision-making process.

Outcomes:

- **The report was noted**

4.	ACCESS TO INFORMATION
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RESOLVED to exclude the public for the following item of business on the grounds that there would be disclosure to them of exempt information under category 3 of The Local Authorities (Access to Information) (Variation) (Wales) Order 2007).

5.	BRIEFING NOTE - FINANCIAL FORECAST
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Documents:

- Briefing note by the Head of Finance

Discussion:

- Information included in the report was not yet in the public domain

- The next formal report will be completed for quarter 2 and will be available to the public in due course
- It was noted that the position had improved from Q1 but there were still many unknowns in relation to the pandemic
- Financial surgeries with schools were still being undertaken albeit virtually
- The overall economy was discussed, and the use of reserves was challenged to support the budget position. Any use of reserves should be considered in the context of the Council's future financial sustainability and resilience.

Outcomes:

- **The report was noted**

Mr J Brautigam (Chair)

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