

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE ECONOMY, RESIDENTS AND COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD AT BY ZOOM ON TUESDAY, 30 JANUARY 2024

PRESENT

County Councillors A Davies, B Davies, A Jones, K Lewis, P James, C Kenyon-Wade and R Devlin

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs G Mitchell, C Masefield, L Rijnenberg

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 2024-2025 BUDGET

General

The Committee noted, observed, or requested that:

- In-depth paperwork was provided which in turn demanded significant deliberation. However, impact assessments could have been more detailed.
- It was useful that future ideas were presented within proposals for challenge, and concerns to be raised in advance of any decision making.

Finance Services

The Committee noted, observed, or requested that:

- Congratulations were shared that a positive start had been made to enable savings to be made whilst providing a fully committed service. Confirmation was provided that the service was comfortable with the reductions shown.
- It was asked how the capital receipt would be found and if County Farms would be considered for disposal, it was explained that the capital receipt target was based on proposed work around Sustainable Powys and the disposal of assets to help capital investment and keep borrowing within sustainable prudent limits.

Legal Services

The Committee noted, observed, or requested that:

- A budget allocation was not provided to the Registration Service and provided by charging a fee, which was almost a full cost recovery.
- Confirmation provided that a contribution towards the increased costs of Coroners was anticipated.

Community Development

The Committee noted, observed, or requested that:

- The Arts Service would be looking at other opportunities of funding to boost the small core budget and would explore how to make the service more sustainable.
- The leisure contract energy saving projects would contribute towards future savings in line with Sustainable Powys and placed-based planning.
- It was explained that the Leisure Review was part of Sustainable Powys and would not be part of budget setting.
- Leisure centres would be sustainable for the financial year, joint working between services was ongoing to explore all options and opportunities.
- Concerns were raised around the size of the maintenance backlog programme of works for leisure centres and how it may increase. It was explained that it was jointly managed between Powys County Council and Freedom Leisure and officers felt that it was manageable.
- Library Services would be supported by additional grant funding for the next couple of years and the core budget would be reduced, the delivery of the service would not be impacted.

Workforce and Organisation Development

The Committee noted, observed, or requested that:

- It was felt that mileage had decreased due to online meetings for both travel time and travel costs, and reassurance was given that savings shown were achievable for the service.

Transformation and Democratic Services

The Committee noted, observed, or requested that:

- It was expressed that an increase in member travel may be seen in the near future with more councillors seeing the benefit of face-to-face meetings.
- 42 staff covered a variety of areas, staffing levels were already limited and other areas within the Council would not be able to conduct the work. After much challenge and discussion within the service additional savings proposals were not put forward and it was felt the service would be in demand to support the delivery of Sustainable Powys.

Property, Planning, & Public Protection

The Committee noted, observed, or requested that:

- Savings around the running costs would be made under the proposal to dispose of/rent the Gwalia building within the financial year, however associated costs would be incurred during the relocation of staff.
- A challenge around flag poles was answered that they would be removed from corporate buildings but retained at County Hall, savings would be gained by less inspection, remedial work and health and safety compliance costs.
- If the 10% increase for cemetery fees was approved the service would be able to achieve full cost recovery for the service.
- Corporate building daily cleaning would continue for certain areas and main areas cleaned once a week.
- To increase estate income additional buildings (Auto Palace) would be opened shortly. Occupancy levels at other buildings (Abermule Business Park) would achieve one hundred percent occupancy and the disposal of commercial units would be considered.
- PAT testing compliance legislation would remain a key priority and health and safety standards would be met; however, it was felt that the Council was over testing and resources could be utilised in other areas.

Highways, Transport and Recycling

The Committee noted, observed, or requested that:

- The proposal shown for grass cutting included county roads in urban areas only which would result in one full cut and any safety cuts required, it excluded all trunk roads as the Council carry out a service on behalf of the Trunk Road Agency with a separate specification.
- Funding had been received to work with partners for grass cutting and collection which would support savings.
- Due to the magnitude of savings needed, it was felt that removing the need of a third party and bringing the residual waste service inhouse would benefit the Council. Assurances were provided that the Abermule Bulking Station was working within permits and closely monitored by Natural Resources Wales. Concerns were raised around contamination, smells, and noise. It was stressed that residents' concerns had been mitigated and no additional resources or equipment would be required, and the site would incur two additional vehicle movements per day.
- Climate change and wetter conditions led to concerns around the ditching reduction, it was expected that eighteen weeks less ditching would be carried out each year.
- A full cost exercise was underway in relation to comments made that the increase in bus fares contradicted the whole sustainable model of the Council for accessibility to public transport which was heavily underutilised.
- Soft market testing was being undertaken to explore the industry standards around charging and booking systems in Household Recycling Centres, and how to provide the best service for the Powys residents. Concerns were raised that fly tipping may increase.
- The Blue Badge charge in car parks was an estimated figure as there was no baseline figures to compare to and only snap survey data.
- LED street lighting would support the savings needed by reducing energy, dimming and part night (turn off at a certain time) plans were in place. It was stressed that only the county road network plans were proposed, and dark skies status may be impacted due to trunk roads running through towns.
- A kerbside collection was provided for day-to-day cardboard and household recycling centres available for larger items. Additional blue cardboard boxes could be provided to residents if needed.
- Appendix C - Post 16 transport was not a statutory service, and a consultation would be needed for 12 months before a decision could be made. An exploration of options was being undertaken.
- Appendix C – Clarification was provided that each road would be individually assessed before a decision was taken around the maintenance need for unclassified roads.
- It was explained that a capital fund was built up from money received from services for replacement vehicles. The proposal was to pause the fund in order to support the pressures within the service. It was hoped that grant funding could be gained to support the purchase of electric vehicles in the near future.
- Structural maintenance of roads was shown to reduce, it was explained a report would be compiled to demonstrate rising costs and how grant funding could support future works as capital projects were long term programmes.

Scrutiny's Recommendation to Cabinet	Accept (plus Action & timescale)	Partially Accept (plus Rationale, Action & timescale)	Reject (plus Rationale)
1. Cabinet to consider options following concerns that the increase in bus fares contradicts the whole Council sustainable model for accessibility to public transport.		We partially accept the recommendation. However, it's important to note that bus fare increases have not increased for a number of years. We are aware of the importance of public transport particularly in a rural area, and there will be a fundamental review during 2024/25 to ensure we expand on the current provision that is sustainable and accessible for residents of Powys.	

5.	REPORTS
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Please see item 4

6.	IMPACT ASSESSMENTS
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Please see item 4

County Councillor Angela Davies (chair)