

**ENVIRONMENTAL & PUBLIC PROTECTION
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
26th FEBRUARY 2016**

Present: Councillor A.P. Cooper (Chair)

Councillors: A. Davies, J.A. Davies, D.C. Evans, I.J. Jackson (Vice-Chair), A. James, W.J. Lemon, A.D.T. Speake, S.E. Thomas, D.E. Williams

Councillor J.D. James – Substitute for Councillor P.M. Edwards

Councillor T. Theophilus – Substitute for Councillor D.B. Davies

Also in attendance:

Councillor T.J. Jones – Executive Board Member for Environmental & Public Protection

The following officers were in attendance:

Mr. M.V. Davies – Head of Property Maintenance & Construction

Mr. S. Pilliner – Head of Transport & Engineering

Ms. R. James – Group Accountant

Ms. K. Thomas – Community Safety Manager

Mrs. S. Watts – Public Health Services Manager

Mr. A. Williams – Street-Scene Manager

Mr. M. Hughes – Assistant Consultant

Venue: Spilman Street Chamber, Carmarthen (10:00 – 11:30am)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors D.B. Davies, P.M. Edwards and W.G. Thomas, as well as Councillor H.A.L. Evans (Executive Board Member for Technical Services).

2. DECLARATIONS OF PERSONAL INTEREST

There were no declarations of personal interest.

3. DECLARATION OF PROHIBITED PARTY WHIPS

There were no declarations of party whips.

4. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

No public questions were received.

5. FORTHCOMING ITEMS

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the items to be considered at the next scheduled meeting on Friday 15th February 2016, be noted.

6. REVENUE & CAPITAL BUDGET MONITORING REPORT 2015/16

The Committee considered the Revenue & Capital Budget Monitoring Report for the Environment Department, Public Protection Services and the Community Safety Team, as at 31st December 2015 in relation to the 2015/16 financial year. The following issues were raised in relation to the report:

In response to a query regarding the non-delivery of severance arrangements worth £78,000 in the Environment Department, the Group Accountant confirmed that due to a variety of circumstances, the proposed severance packages had not been realised although it was anticipated that these would be taken up in the next financial year. The Street-Scene Manager advised the Committee that some severance applications were being reconsidered as part of a departmental service review.

It was asked whether the asset transfer of public conveniences would be completed on time. The Street-Scene Manager informed the Committee that to date, 10 sets of public conveniences had been transferred to community councils or groups and that a further 8 were on-going. It was envisaged that these would be completed within the three years allocated to the programme, as it was a matter of clarifying some minor legal issues with the respective organisations.

In response to a question on the £72,000 overspend for the Cleansing Service, the Street-Scene Manager explained that this related to efficiencies that had been proposed for the current financial year. However, as the Department no longer needed to find additional efficiencies in the forthcoming years, this would be managed within the service.

Reference was made to the recent inclement weather and the amount of recycle strewn along the county's roads and it was asked what impact this was having on the Street Cleansing Service. The Street-Scene Manager acknowledged that the additional litter did have an impact as cleaning this up had to be factored in to the regular street cleansing programme. There had not been any reduction in the number of staff employed and town centres had a seven day programme for litter picking and bin emptying. He reminded Committee members that if they had specific concerns about certain areas in their wards, that they should contact the Department.

In response to a question about the possibility of residents being issued with wheelie bins, the Street-Scene Manager noted that the cost of such a system was prohibitive at present. He also reminded the Committee that if recycle or residual waste bags split and fell from the back of a Council vehicle, operators would clean up at that time, however, if the waste was on private property, it was the duty of the householder to ensure it was cleaned up.

Reference was made to the number of public bins that were not being emptied and subsequently rubbish was left next to or around bins and was further compounded

by dog owners not disposing of dog waste bags in these bins but leaving them in side streets or lanes. The Street-Scene Manager advised the Committee that the provision of bins and the collection programme would have been reduced had the budget for 2016/17 not been so favourable for the Department and he envisaged that bin collections might now be increased over the coming months.

An update was requested on the current status of the waste strategy in light of the £54,000 underspend. The Street-Scene Manager informed the Committee that the initial part of the strategy dealing with route and vehicle rationalisation had been completed and had produced significant savings for the service. The second part was on-going and dealt with the disposal and treatment aspect of the county's waste and the tendering process which needed to be completed by April 2018. An internal officer working group was now in place to drive this forward and funding had been set aside to cover this work.

Reference was made to the various underspends in the Transport section and an explanation sought in relation to the overspend in the primary school transport service. The Head of Transport & Engineering informed the Committee that many of the underspends referred to in the report were due to the effective planning and tendering processes put in place by officers. However, a number of primary school closures were having an adverse effect on the primary sector transport budget as children were now being transported to schools further afield. This was an example of a small change having a huge financial impact but officers were continually assessing the situation and seeking to ensure that contracts and routes were the most efficient possible. However, he added that transport for children with special educational needs was very complex and often, due to the complexity of their needs or behavioural difficulties, this required specialist transport options and transport assistants. This area was growing in terms of numbers and officers had recently commenced a TIC review in conjunction with the Education & Children Department to understand the demand and assess whether the services provided were appropriate and efficient.

Disappointment was expressed at the continued overspend for the Nant-y-Ci Park & Ride facility and clarity was sought as to the Hywel Dda Health Board's contribution to this scheme and how it could assist in easing the parking issues at the West Wales General Hospital in Glangwili. The Head of Transport & Engineering acknowledged that the parking situation in and around the hospital was a significant pressure for his service at present, both in terms of residents' complaints and the impact on the movement of local passenger transport services. He informed the Committee that the Health Board had made a contribution to the Park & Ride Scheme and it was also taking steps to ease the congestion in the out-patients car park, such as preventing staff from parking there, reducing the number of consultants car parking spaces and promoting the use of the park and ride scheme amongst staff. Discussions were also on-going with the University of Wales Trinity Saint David in relation to the parking pressures that it would be facing in light of the development of the Carmarthen West Link Road and relocation of S4C nearby. Strategically, it was an important service to keep as in the long-term it would assist in reducing traffic congestion across the town.

Reference was made to the underspend in the Building Maintenance budget in relation to the Carmarthenshire Home Standard Programme. The Head of Property Maintenance & Construction informed the Committee that this was in fact an overspend due to an unachievable income target. Significant inroads had been made to reduce this overspend which included rationalising back office functions as

well as bringing previously outsourced work back in-house. He also noted that some savings were not actually shown in this particular budget report as they were being allocated to other budgets such as the Modernising Education Programme or Housing Services. Officers were continuing to work with Financial Services to address the validation issues which had led to this particular service being expected to generate an income, even though the CHS programme was coming to an end.

Clarification was sought for the overspend of £25,000 on the repair and maintenance of pumping stations. The Head of Property Maintenance & Construction reminded the Committee that the Authority's Hydrology Unit had transferred to Welsh Water in October 2014 along with the budget for the service. The Authority had since negotiated an early takeover of the Cross Hands and New Dock (Llanelli) pumping stations which had been transferred to Welsh Water control in January 2016, thus reducing the repair and maintenance costs borne by the Authority.

It was suggested that the grounds maintenance service had been cut back so much that this was resulting in poorly maintained property such as car parks and other assets, giving a poor first impression of the county. The Head of Transport & Engineering informed the Committee that a Service Level Agreement was in place to maintain car parks but he was happy to meet with local members to discuss any specific issues on site. The Head of Property Maintenance & Construction acknowledged that officers were looking at the future of the service and in-sourcing some work, subject to the business cases being approved. In response to an additional question, he stated that at a corporate level, officers were also revising the standards for cutting procedures and ensuring that the right staff were deployed to programmed work rather than being used for responsive duties.

It was asked whether there was an underlying issue as to why agency staff were being used in the Public Protection Business Support Unit. The Public Health Services Manager informed the Committee that this was now being addressed as permanent posts had now been authorised for this unit.

It was asked why so many income streams in Public Protection and Trading Standards Services had failed to reach the anticipated levels. The Public Health Services Manager informed the Committee that for Licencing, the Authority was bound by the fact that these fees were prescribed by the UK Government and the charges did not reflect the actual costs involved in the process. However, as the Committee would recall from its December meeting, other fees (e.g. taxis, animal movement) would be increased from April 2016 enabling the Authority to charge more realistic fees for its services. She noted that the Trading Standards Services Management income stream referred to some external work undertaken by the service in past years which had subsequently been validated into this year's budget. However, the service had not undertaken this work in the current financial year and therefore the target could not be met.

In response to an additional question, the Public Health Services Manager reassured the Committee that there was considerable lobbying of the UK Government being undertaken by both the Local Government Association in England and the Welsh Local Government Association, to allow local authorities to set fees on a local level. These fees would enable authorities to cover all their costs as some such as administration, compliance checks and enforcement were not currently factored in to the fees set by Whitehall.

Reference was made to the Trading Standards member development seminar held on the 25th February 2016 and Committee members acknowledged that this had been an excellent and worthwhile session. The Committee agreed to request that its appreciation and thanks be forwarded to the Trading Standards Services Manager and his staff for the seminar and for their on-going work to target criminal activity and protect the county's vulnerable residents from exploitation.

It was suggested that many of the Committee's questions in relation to the budget monitoring report were due to insufficient explanations provided in the 'main variance summaries' listed with each appendix. It was therefore proposed that officers be requested to provide more comprehensive explanations for under or overspends in future budget monitoring reports. The Committee agreed to the proposal.

Reference was made to the Community Safety budget and it was asked what results were being achieved for all the funding given to substance misuse treatment providers whilst individuals in Llanelli continued to die from drug-related deaths. The Community Safety Manager acknowledged that the recent deaths were a concern and that a multi-agency meeting was due to be held during the forthcoming week to plan a response. She reminded the Committee that for services commissioned directly by the regional Area Planning Board, regular performance monitoring of the providers was undertaken although it was difficult to monitor their effectiveness in preventing overdoses.

In response to an additional comment about the role of the Police in targeting drug dealers, the Community Safety Manager reminded the Committee members that should they have specific concerns that the Police were not responding to issues reported to the police, they should contact the local inspector or she was happy to liaise with senior police colleagues as appropriate.

Clarification was sought for the CCTV operator costs. The Community Safety Manager reminded the Committee that the Authority had ceased providing a monitored CCTV service in June 2015 and these related to redundancy costs which had remained in the budget for 2015/16.

It was asked why the Capital Budget continued include the B4300 Cystanog Bends / Capel Dewi Highway Support Wall project when this had been completed last year. The Street-Scene Manager informed the Committee that an element of the payment for a project such as this was normally held back until the maintenance period had been completed.

In response to a question about the Trebeddrod Reservoir, the Street-Scene Manager informed the Committee that this was due to be completed in February but due to the recent inclement weather, the completion of the work was now scheduled to be completed in mid-April.

Clarification was sought for which bridge in Ammanford had undergone strengthening and replacement works and it was suggested that the naming of bridges should be more specific. The Street-Scene Manager confirmed that this was the small bridge located near Coleg Sir Gâr's Ammanford campus and not the Loughor River bridge, near the railway station. He added that he was not aware of a local name for this bridge and assumed that it had been named 'Ammanford College Bridge' for the purposes of the report due to its proximity to the college's campus.

The Committee **RESOLVED** that:

- 6.1 The report be received.
- 6.2 That officers be requested to provide more comprehensive explanations for under or overspends in future budget monitoring reports.
- 6.3 That the Committee's appreciation and thanks be forwarded to the Trading Standards Services Manager and his staff for an excellent member development seminar held on the 25th February 2016 and for their on-going work to target criminal activity and protect the county's vulnerable residents from exploitation.

7. EXPLANATION FOR NON-SUBMISSION OF SCRUTINY REPORT

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the reason for the non-submission of the report on the 'Impact of Local Authority Trading Standards in Challenging Times', be noted.

8. ENVIRONMENTAL & PUBLIC PROTECTION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE ACTIONS AND REFERRALS UPDATE

The Committee considered an update detailing progress in relation to actions, requests or referrals emerging from previous scrutiny meetings. The Chair referred to the one out-standing action relating to the Committee's request for a seminar on corporate manslaughter and noted that a development session was being prepared. When a date was finalised, members would be notified accordingly.

RESOLVED that the update, be noted.

9. TO SIGN AS A CORRECT RECORD THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COMMITTEE HELD ON THE 11TH JANUARY 2016

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on Monday 11th January 2016 be signed as a correct record.

SIGNED: _____ (Chair)

DATE: _____