

COUNTY BOROUGH OF BLAENAU GWENT

REPORT TO:	<u>THE PRESIDING MEMBER AND MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL</u>
SUBJECT:	<u>SPECIAL MEETING OF THE COUNCIL – 27TH FEBRUARY, 2024</u>
REPORT OF:	<u>DEMOCRATIC OFFICER</u>

PRESENT: COUNCILLOR C. SMITH (PRESIDING MEMBER, CHAIRING)

Councillors S. Behr
D. Bevan
K. Chaplin
M. Cross
G. A. Davies
M. Day
S. Edmunds
J. Gardner
J. Hill
W. Hodgins
J. Holt
G. Humphreys
E. Jones
R. Leadbeater
J. Morgan, J.P.
J. C. Morgan
J. P. Morgan
L. Parsons
D. Rowberry
T. Smith
G. Thomas
J. Thomas
S. Thomas
H. Trollope
J. Wilkins
D. Wilkshire
L. Winnett
D. Woods

AND: Interim Chief Executive
 Corporate Director of Regeneration & Community Services
 Interim Corporate Director of Social Services
 Interim Corporate Director of Education
 Chief Officer Resources
 Chief Officer Commercial & Customer
 Head of Legal & Corporate Compliance
 Head of Democratic Services, Governance & Partnerships
 Head of Organisational Development
 Service Manager - Accountancy
 Service Manager Performance & Democratic
 Communications & Marketing Manager
 Press & Publicity Officer

<u>ITEM</u>	<u>SUBJECT</u>	<u>ACTION</u>
1.	<p><u>SIMULTANEOUS TRANSLATION</u></p> <p>It was noted that no requests had been received for the simultaneous translation service.</p>	
2.	<p><u>APOLOGIES</u></p> <p>Apologies for absence were received from Councillors P. Baldwin, H. Cunningham, D. Davies and J. Millard.</p>	
3.	<p><u>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND DISPENSATIONS</u></p> <p>There were no declarations of interest or dispensations reported.</p>	

4.

DISCRETIONARY FEES & CHARGES 2024/2025

Members considered the report of the Chief Officer Resources.

It was unanimously,

RESOLVED that the report be accepted and Option 2 be endorsed, namely:

- The register of Fees & Charges for 2024/2025 be approved together with the following discretionary fees & charges:
 - a fee uplift of 5% in line with the assumption for inflation within the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS);
 - the alternative fees proposed as detailed in paragraphs 5.1.4 to 5.1.14 of the report; and
 - Planning Fees as attached at Appendix 2.
- Delegated power and responsibility be granted to the Interim Director of Social Services for setting the fees and charges for 2024/2025 relating to the provision of external social care as detailed in paragraph 5.1.6 of the report.
- The core price increases relating to Aneurin Leisure Trust attached at Appendix 3 be approved.

5.

REVENUE BUDGET 2024/2025

Consideration was given to the report of the Chief Officer Resources.

Bridging the Gap Business Cases

The Leader of the Council proposed that the following **be agreed**:

- CS01 – Members Allowances – To reduce the budget for Employers Superannuation Contributions - £12,000.
- CS03 – Resources Department – Review of staffing structures - £157,000.
- CS04 – Budget reductions to Inflationary Increases & Transformation Budgets, reduction to inflationary uplifts to supplies & services across all portfolio budgets and increase to grant income for Universal free school meals - £1,946,000.
- CS05 - CCTV - Budget Review and reduction to staffing budget & supplies and services to reflect expenditure - £40,173.
- CS07 - Corporate Services / Commercial and Customer – Departmental Review of staffing Structures - £347,100.
- CS09 - Corporate & Performance - Review and reduction of staffing budgets to reflect reduced contractual hours - £22,100.
- CS10 - Every service would be required to achieve budget reductions of 1% in addition to the other budget proposals - £1,000,000.
- CS11 - Increase Discretionary Fees & Charges by a minimum of 5% - £100,000.
- CS12 - Increase council tax by 4.95% - £361,000.
- CS14 – Co-opted Members Allowances - Reduce budget to reflect expenditure - £12,000.

- ECON02 - Economy / Business & Regeneration – maximisation of grant funding - £17,000.
- ECON03 - Review of Service Delivery / Alternative Service Delivery / Income Generation - £50,000.

- ED02 - 10% reduction in the contribution to the EAS - £34,000.
- ED04 - Cash flat Management Fee to Aneurin Leisure Trust - £135,670.
- ED05 - Schools Budget - Cash flat / Budget cut to Individual Schools Budget - (ISB) - £1,051,000. However, specific cost pressures totalling £864,000 (ALN provision, increase in pupil numbers and the new Welsh School) were agreed which would equate in effect to a 1.6% uplift to the ISB (Individual School's Budget) and would be funded by the Council.
- ED06 - Review of Staffing Budgets & maximisation of grant funding - £107,460.

- ENV01 - Public Protection - Review of Staffing Structures - £100,000.
- ENV09 - Trade Waste - Increase Trade Waste prices to Businesses by 5% - £2,220.
- ENV11 - Waste Services - Charging an Admin Fee related to delivering replacement Residual Bins and Recycling Bags – this proposal would be implemented on a **trial basis in order that its implementation could be monitored and evaluated** - £3,662.
- ENV12 - Household Waste Recycling Centres - Review of operating days /hours this proposal would be implemented on a **trial basis in order that its implementation could be monitored and evaluated** - £34,000.
- ENV15 - Review of Staffing Budget - Budget reduction relating to a deleted post - £45,000.

- SS01 - Adult Services - Newly created Social Care and Housing Support Commissioning Service - £57,000.
- SS02 - Adult Services - Rationalisation/Reduction of Staffing Levels- £113,000.

- SS04 - Adult Services - Reduction in domicillary care Packages through improved quality assurance measures - £250,000.
- SS05 - Provider Services - Reduction in Community Options and Day Centre Transport - £153,560.
- SS06 - Provider Services - Rationalisation/Reduction of Staffing Levels - £110,000.
- SS07 - Children's Services - Temporary Reduction of Staffing Levels in Placement Team - £56,000.
- SS08 - Children's Services - Rationalisation/Reduction of Staffing Levels in Early Years Team - £73,000.
- SS10 - Children's Services - Rationalisation/Reduction of Staffing Levels in Supporting Change Team - £110,000.
- SS11 - Children's Services - Rationalisation/Reduction of Staffing Levels in Safeguarding Team - £113,900.

The following proposal **be not agreed:**

- ECON01 - Estates - Review of Staffing Structures – this proposal would not currently be pursued.

In addition to the above proposals a draw from reserves of £1,494.000 was also agreed for 2024/2025.

The Leader of the Council concluded by advising that should the above proposals be agreed the **£8,336,000** budget savings target would be achieved.

The above proposals were seconded.

The Leader of the Independent Group commenced by confirming that the Group supported the majority of the proposals outlined above by the Leader of the Council and had only differed on three of the proposals.

The Group Leader continued by advising that due to concerns that had been raised at the recent Corporate & Performance Scrutiny Committee and in discussion with the Leader, it had been agreed that in order to provide a level

of reassurance that two of the business cases would be agreed subject to a trial basis, in order that the proposals could be monitored, evaluated and the findings reported back to Council in due course and these were:

- ENV11 - Waste Services - Charging an Admin Fee related to delivering replacement Residual Bins and Recycling Bags.
- ENV12 - Household Waste Recycling Centres - Review of operating days /hours.

However, the Independent Group did not agree with the **Council Tax increase proposal and proposed the following amendment:**

- A Council Tax increase of 4.75%.

This would increase the draw on reserves.

This proposal was seconded.

A recorded vote was, thereupon, requested.

In Favour of the amended proposal to increase Council Tax by 4.75% – Councillors G. A. Davies, M. Day, J. Hill, W. Hodgins, J. Holt, G. Humphreys, J. P. Morgan, L. Parsons, G. Thomas, J. Wilkins.

Against the amended proposal the proposal to increase Council Tax by 4.75% – Councillors S. Behr, D. Bevan, K. Chaplin, M. Cross, S. Edmunds, J. Gardner, R. Leadbeater, E. Jones, J. Morgan, J.P., J. C. Morgan, D. Rowberry, C. Smith, T. Smith, J. Thomas, S. Thomas, H. Trollope, D. Wilkshire, L. Winnett, D. Woods.

The vote on the amendment was not carried.

A further verbal vote was not required in respect of the original proposal to increase Council Tax by 4.95% but Members agreed that the result from the initial vote taken be reversed and included in the decisions for the record.

In Favour of the proposal to increase Council Tax by 4.95% – Councillors S. Behr, D. Bevan, K. Chaplin, M. Cross, S. Edmunds, J. Gardner, R. Leadbeater, E. Jones, J. Morgan, J.P., J. C. Morgan, D. Rowberry, C. Smith, T. Smith, J. Thomas, S. Thomas, H. Trollope, D. Wilkshire, L. Winnett, D. Woods.

Against the proposal the proposal to increase Council Tax by 4.95% – Councillors G. A. Davies, M. Day, J. Hill, W. Hodgins, J. Holt, G. Humphreys, J. P. Morgan, L. Parsons, G. Thomas, J. Wilkins.

RESOLVED, subject to the foregoing, that the report be accepted and Option 1 be endorsed, namely:

- The 2024/25 revenue budget as shown in table in paragraph 5.1.15 of the report be agreed.
- The outcomes within the overall provisional Revenue Support Grant (RSG) Settlement and the potential for further change in the Final RSG Settlement (paragraphs 2.6 – 2.17 of the report) be noted.
- The outcomes within the BGCBC provisional RSG Settlement and its impact upon the Medium Term Financial Strategy (paragraphs 2.18 – 2.26 of the report) be noted.
- The updated cost pressures and growth items (£2.8m in total) identified in Appendix 2 (paragraphs 5.1.10 – 5.1.16 of the report) for inclusion in the Council's budget be agreed.
- The Bridging the Gap proposals delivering financial efficiencies and budget cuts towards the budget gap (paragraphs 5.1.25 to 5.1.37 of the report) be approved **with the exception of:**

ECON01 - Estates - Review of Staffing Structures.

- A cash flat budget for the Individual Schools Budget (ISB) be agreed. However, cost pressures totalling
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£864,000 (ALN provision, increase in pupil numbers and the new Welsh School) would be funded by the Council, equating to a 1.6% uplift.

- Grant/s transferring into the Final Settlement for 2024/2025 be passported to the relevant service/s.
- The use of reserves in the sum of £1.494m to balance the budget for 2024/2025 be approved.
- A Council tax increase of 4.95% for 2024/25 be agreed.
- The updated Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) for 2024/2025 to 2028/2029 attached at Appendix 5 be approved.