

Annex 3



VOLUNTARY SECTOR LIAISON COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, YSTRAD MYNACH ON THURSDAY 5TH DECEMBER 2019 AT 10.30 A.M.

PRESENT:

Ms M. Jones (Chair)
Councillor Mrs E.M. Aldworth (Vice Chair)

Councillors:

A. Collis, K. Etheridge, J.E. Fussell, R.W. Gough, A.G. Higgs, Mrs T. Parry, W. Williams

Also in Attendance:

P. Cooke (Senior Policy Officer), A. Palmer (CCBC/GAVO), R. Kyte (Head of Regeneration and Planning), R. Hartshorn (Head of Public Protection, Community & Leisure Services) A. Cullinane (Senior Policy Officer - Equalities, Welsh Language and Consultation) and S. Hughes (Committee Services Officer).

Together with Representatives from:

GAVO (Martin Featherstone, Stephen Tiley)
Blaenau Gwent and Caerphilly Care & Repair Cymru (R. Evans)
Abertridwr Community Church (L. Clay)
Vanguard Caerphilly (M. Wade)
The United Reformed Church (J. Wade)
Oakdale Community Centre (R. Evans)
The Youth Centre, Cefn Hengoed (J. Pritchard)
Groundwork Wales (K. Stevenson, P. Gater)
Caerphilly and Blaenau Gwent Citizens Advice (S. Ellington)
Caerphilly People First (C. Luke)
The Office of the Gwent Police and Crime Commissioner (C. Latham)
South Wales Fire and Rescue Services (T. Ryder)
Town and Community Councils Representative (H. Llewellyn)

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors J. Bevan, S. Cook, D. Harse, Mrs B.A. Jones, A Whitcombe, R. Whiting, L.G. Whittle, K. Peters (Corporate Policy Manager), Vicki Doyle (Policy Officer), together with representatives from Menter Iaith Sir Caerffili, Charter Housing (now part of the Pobl Group) and Natural Resources Wales.

2. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

Councillor A. Higgs declared a personal interest in all agenda items as a Council Representative on the GAVO Executive Committee and Grants to the Voluntary Sector Committee.

3. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

The Chair welcomed those in attendance to the meeting and introductions were made.

With permission from the Chair, the Senior Policy Officer (Equalities, Welsh Language and Consultation) addressed the Committee to make Members aware of the consultation on the Draft Strategic Equality Objectives Plan 2020-2024. Members of the Committee were asked to engage in the consultation to give their views on the proposed Equality Objectives for 2020-2024 and to identify the most appropriate actions for inclusion in the plan. It was highlighted that the consultation will close on 6th December 2019.

4. MINUTES – 26TH SEPTEMBER 2019

The minutes of the meeting held on the 26th September 2019 were approved as a correct record.

Matters arising from the minutes, in relation to Minute No. 4, Vanguard Caerphilly will be raising money for Blood Bikes Wales at their gala concert which will be held in July 2020, as a result of the presentation received at the last meeting.

In relation to Minute No. 5, disappointment was expressed in that the meeting of the Grants to the Voluntary Sector Committee was postponed last month and confirmation was requested that the report highlighting the conclusions and recommendations from GAVO will be going forward to the next meeting. Councillor R. Gough agreed to contact the Policy Officer to ensure that the report is included on the agenda for the next Grants to the Voluntary Sector Committee meeting and will report back through the Voluntary Sector Liaison Committee.

5. DRAFT BUDGET PROPOSALS FOR 2020-21

The Chair referred the Committee to the report which provided details of draft budget proposals based on a range of assumptions in the absence of details of the Welsh Government (WG) Provisional Local Government Financial Settlement for 2020/21. The report also provided details of draft savings proposals, along with a proposed increase of 6.95% in council tax to enable the Authority to set a balanced budget for the 2020/21 financial year. The Committee were invited to consider the report and provide comments on the draft budget proposals which will form part of the consultation responses when the final budget is considered by Council in February 2020.

Members of the Committee referred to the proposed savings listed in Appendix 2 and expressed concerns over the proposed reduction in the Voluntary Sector budget (Ref. C28), which will be achieved through a further reduction in the current Service

Level Agreement (SLA) funding allocated to three voluntary sector organisations (Citizens Advice, GAVO and Groundwork). Members highlighted the detrimental impact the proposed saving would have on the support that is given to the Voluntary Sector. During the course of the ensuing debate, concerns were expressed regarding the impact on the organisations, future service provision and the significant impact to members of the public. It was emphasised that a reduction in funding for these organisations will have a massive impact on local residents, particularly vulnerable and at risk people. Members of the Committee expressed concerns as to how the budget proposals had been decided.

S. Ellington (Caerphilly and Blaenau Gwent Citizens Advice) reported that no wider consultation had taken place with the Citizens Advice regarding the significant proposed reduction in the budget and the impact it will have on future service provision and local residents. Concerns were raised that Citizens Advice will not be able to employ staff to deliver the service and provide the high quality support functions. Members emphasised the link between access to advice and wellbeing, and highlighted the impact it has on debt and mental health. It was questioned as to whether the number of suicides will increase as a result of these proposed savings.

Following on from the discussion K. Stevenson (Groundwork Wales) considered the proposed savings to be disproportionate. She highlighted that proprietary is huge in terms of the leverage they make and a reduction in funding will mean that some programmes will have to be closed which will impact on people's health and wellbeing.

The consultation process for the draft budget proposals for 2020-21 was discussed. During the course of the debate concerns were raised regarding a lack of consultation and engagement. The Committee emphasised the need for the Voluntary Sector, particularly those organisations that are affected by the proposed savings, should be consulted much earlier in the process to enable them to share concerns prior to proposals being set. It was highlighted that a number of the drop in sessions, which have been held to allow residents to discuss the proposals, have taken place during working hours. Members of the Committee were concerned that the final decision by Council will be made with a poor response to the consultation.

A proposal was made to send a letter to the Leader of the Council expressing the concerns raised regarding the lack of consultation and engagement with direct partners prior to the budget being approved.

Representatives of the Voluntary Sector were of the opinion that decisions were being made by Officers of the Council and not Elected Members and questions were raised as to who makes the decisions. Representatives of the Voluntary Sector felt that elected Members should be asking more questions.

J. Pritchard (The Youth Centre, Cefn Hengoed) informed Members of the Committee that no consultation has taken place with Community Centres. She emphasised the need to oppose the reduction in the Voluntary Sector budget saving proposal (Ref. C28). She advised that Officers will then present their report to Cabinet and Council who will make the final decision.

M. Featherstone (GAVO) recognised the significant impact on the three organisations affected by the draft savings proposals and thanked Members of the Committee for their comments.

The Head of Public Protection, Community & Leisure Services addressed the Committee to add context regarding the draft budget proposals and consultation process. In response to queries regarding impact assessments it was confirmed that there are templates that describe the impact of the proposals available on the Council's website.

Members were referred to Appendix 2 of the report and asked to note that the proposed saving to reduce the Voluntary Sector budget is considered as a significant public impact. In response to a comment made by a Member of the Committee, the Officer disagreed that the budget is officer led as the report was considered by Cabinet. The Officer explained that there are a lot of proposals in the draft budget which very much impact on the Voluntary Sector and encouraged Members of the Committee to provide comments which will feed into the ongoing consideration of the budget proposals to be considered by full Council in February 2020.

The impact of previous years' budget cuts was discussed and Members of the Committee stressed that if the proposed savings are agreed it would mean a loss of over 60% in funding over the last 5 years.

P. Cooke (Senior Policy Officer) recognised the significant impact on the Voluntary Sector. He endorsed the comments of Head of Public Protection, Community & Leisure Services, as he would like to see the Voluntary Sector supported as much as possible.

Following on from previous discussions T. Ryder (South Wales Fire and Rescue Services) addressed the concerns raised by Members of the Committee from an emergency services perspective. He advised that consequences of the reduction in the Voluntary Sector budget is not only suicide, but also crime, poverty and antisocial behaviour. Concerns were raised as to how these issues can be tackled if the proposed savings go ahead.

J. Pritchard (The Youth Centre, Cefn Hengoed) reported that every year more money is collected in council tax than has been estimated in the budget, which is based on a certain percentage collection rate. There is therefore a surplus at the end of the year which Cabinet can spend on capital projects, which in recent years this had been allocated to the 21st Century Schools. By raising the estimated council tax collection rate money could be released in the revenue budget to allow the withdrawal of the cuts objected to.

Representatives of the Voluntary Sector requested more involvement from Councillors in respect of visiting community centres outside of their areas to see the good work going on across the borough.

Reference was made to the meeting of the Voluntary Sector Representatives to discuss the draft budget proposals for 2020-21 held on 20th November 2019. The proposed saving for Corporate Property – all leaseholders to discharge maintenance obligations (Ref. B10) was discussed. This refers to community centres and pavilions funded by Corporate Property. It was explained that some community centres and pavilions are on leases and others are on licences. R. Evans (Oakdale Community Centre) expressed the importance of having a level playing field and a uniform policy that applies to public buildings. C Luke (Caerphilly People First) voiced concerns that the questions raised under the actions of the meeting had not been put forward or addressed. It was suggested that these questions are included in the letter to the Leader of the Council.

The proposal to send a letter to the Leader of the Council was supported by the Committee. It was agreed that S. Tiley (GAVO) would link with the necessary organisations to compose the letter, which will include all the points raised at this meeting and at the Voluntary Sector Representatives meeting held on 20th November 2019, and to also include improved communication in that the Voluntary Sector need to be involved in any budget proposals at the earliest stage. It was agreed to send the letter to the Leader of the Council on behalf of the Voluntary Sector Liaison Committee.

The Head of Regeneration and Planning updated the Committee on the restructure of the Regeneration Service and the new appointments to the Business Enterprise and Renewal Team and the Community Regeneration Team. The Officer responded to questions raised regarding duplication of work and advised that the Business Enterprise and Renewal Team will be working in partnership with and providing a complimentary role to GAVO by providing assistance with the grant application process.

The Officer welcomed the suggestion from the Committee to receive a presentation at the next meeting from the Business Enterprise and Renewal Team and the Community Regeneration Team in terms of the new appointments and their priorities moving forward. It was also agreed that the Officer would circulate a short summary of the roles of the Business Enterprise and Renewal Team and the Communication Regeneration Team by e-mail.

The Caerphilly Enterprise Fund was discussed and Members were informed that information is available on the Caerphilly County Borough Council website. The Officer agreed to request that the Voluntary Sector Liaison Committee Members be invited to the formal launch of the fund in the new year.

6. ITEMS OF INTEREST CONCERNING THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR COMPACT PARTNERS

P. Cooke (Senior Policy Officer) advised Members of the Committee that the Public Services Board Annual Report is being produced and asked them to identify case studies or examples of good practice, to be sent to Alison Palmer.

J. Pritchard (The Youth Centre, Cefn Hengoed) informed Members of the Committee that the Council has received £85,000 from Welsh Government to spend on food poverty in the borough.

The Committee was informed that the Chief Executive has expressed an interest in visiting all Town and Community Councils in the borough to look at how they can work with the County Borough.

The Committee was informed that Vanguard Caerphilly Centre has a busy schedule of Christmas events including several concerts.

GAVO updated the Committee on the Pride in Your Place Community Awards.

The meeting ended at 12.02 pm.

Approved as a correct record and subject to amendments or corrections agreed and recorded in the minutes of the meeting held on 19th March 2020, they were signed by the Chair.

CHAIR