

10th January 2020

Voluntary Sector Liaison Committee Response to Caerphilly County Borough Council Budget Consultation

I am writing on behalf of the Voluntary Sector Liaison Committee (VSLC) members in response to the Caerphilly County Borough Council (CCBC) draft budget proposals for 2020/21. The VSLC would like to submit the following comments in addition to the formal consultation on 5th December 2019.

VSLC members empathise with the impact that austerity has had on Local Authority budgets across Wales and recognise that this is a challenging time with added uncertainty linked to Brexit. However, they would like to use this communication to raise the following points:

- It was explained at the December Voluntary Sector Liaison Committee, that CCBC Departments were asked to submit proposals as to how they would manage a percentage cut to their existing budgets. This approach does not accommodate the relative budget sizes of departments, for example the Policy Department has a proportionally smaller budget and where the VSLC understand the Voluntary Sector cuts are being made is therefore 'hit harder'. This approach also reinforces the silo methodology and does not therefore reflect a joined up strategy for financial reduction across the Authority. For example, it is not clear from the reductions proposed to GAVO, CAB and Groundwork what CCBC's over-arching Strategy for the Third Sector in the County Borough will be in the future.
- The 40% proposed reduction in funding that is outlined in the budget proposals that GAVO, Groundwork and Citizens Advice receive from CCBC through an annual Service Level Agreement (SLA) appears entirely disproportionate to the funding settlement that CCBC will be receiving from Welsh Government. For example, it is understood that Local Authorities across Wales have been awarded a 4.3% budget increase for 2020/21. The VSLC would expect that this increase would enable CCBC to review the budget proposals. In the light of this settlement the VSLC look forward to receiving further communication to this effect.
- In terms of the rationale for decision making, the VSLC would also appreciate further explanation and clarity with reference to the criteria for measuring the impact of proposed funding reductions. It appears that the current approach is inward looking and considers the impact on the local authority, rather than a more robust process which would consider the impact on other sectors, communities and citizens as a whole. This would then enable the process to be one of participation and collaboration and in line with the Social Services and Wellbeing Act and Wellbeing of Future Generations Act. Members were

also concerned that equalities impact assessments were not immediately available on publication of the budget proposals. This is a missed opportunity for a more inclusive approach to budget setting where consideration of the equalities impact should be taken at a much earlier stage in the process, with consultation with those most likely to be affected. In considering the wider budget reductions proposed, VSLC members were keen to offer alternative solutions or discuss alternative ways of working which could lead to the same budget savings.

- In recognising the importance of the CCBC 'Team Caerphilly Better Together' operating model, moving forward and noting the focus on Corporate Volunteering, Community Asset Transfer, Consultation and Engagement Framework and Community Hubs as areas that have a particular synergy with the third sector, there was concern that CCBC departments are not taking advantage of the willingness of the third sector and residents to input into decision making processes. VSLC members would like to understand how the Team Caerphilly approach links to CCBC responsibilities and opportunities through the Social Service and Well-being Act and the Well-being of Future Generations Act, in particular the five ways of working and the focus on involvement of the community and the long term well-being of residents.

As outlined previous, the VSLC acknowledges and empathises with the difficult decisions required in respect of austerity but feel it is important to outline the main issues that affect the VSLC and the Third Sector in general through our response. In responding to the consultation, the Voluntary Sector Liaison Committee would like to reiterate its willingness to work with the authority and the PSB partners, in the spirit of the Third Sector Partnership Agreement 2018-2023, for the benefit of the residents of the county borough. As the VSLC, we wait in anticipation of your response.



Michelle Jones
Chair
Voluntary Sector Liaison Committee