

Gerald Jones MP
Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney

Mrs Christina Harrhy
Interim Chief Executive
Caerphilly County Borough Council
Penallta House
Tredomen Business Park
Ystrad Mynach
CF82 7PG

Our Ref: GJ5730

10 January 2019

Dear Christina,

I would like to offer the following comments on the Council's budget strategy for 2019 /20.

Firstly, can I offer my congratulations to the authority on the work that it has done in recent years to maintain front line services in the face of severe cuts emanating as a result of the austerity measures of the UK Government over the past 8 years.

I fully appreciate how hard it is becoming to sustain front line services with ongoing financial pressures. I raised this very issue in Parliament during the Budget debate on 1st November 2018 stating that cuts being considered by local authorities are the result of the Tory Government's austerity agenda. I fully acknowledge that Councils across the UK are having to make hugely tough decisions about cutting local services, but these are decisions over which Councils really have very little choice, owing to the harsh austerity inflicted by the Government.

Whilst I note that many of the proposals do not impact directly on front line services, some of them will impact indirectly on services that residents use and value. However, there are some that will have a more direct impact on residents and it is these proposals that I wish to focus on.

- The Community Safety Warden Service was a flagship proposal of the Labour authority elected in 2004. It has developed as a popular service and has assisted Gwent Police in dealing with rising levels of anti social behaviour across Caerphilly County Borough, particularly in some of our more isolated

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communities. This service is highly regarded by residents and would have a negative impact on community safety if the service is withdrawn. If at all possible, I would ask that the Council reconsiders this proposal.

- The proposal to close community centres will have a negative impact on those communities affected. 3 of the 4 proposed closures are in the Upper Rhymney Valley, the area of the Borough that I represent and an area that also has some of the most deprived communities in the country. Whilst I note that 1 has already closed I would urge the Council to give further consideration to the poverty that exists in these communities and the impact that the closure of these centres will have on the ability to address social exclusion in these communities. Car ownership is lower in the Upper Rhymney Valley and public transport is not adequate to allow people to travel to access services, therefore community centres can play a hugely important role in community life. In addition, the ability of Caerphilly CBC to offer youth services has been reduced in recent years and therefore again, community centres can have a key role in addressing this. If community centres are withdrawn, the ability to deliver on any of this would be lost in communities that are already disproportionately disadvantaged. I would therefore urge the authority to reconsider these proposals if at all possible.

I am grateful for the opportunity to comment on the budget proposals and look forward to working with the authority in the future to deliver front line public services for the benefit of the communities we all serve.

Yours sincerely

Gerald Jones MP