

Cllr Barbara Jones
Budget Speech 22/02/2017

I'm feeling very proud this evening.

I am proud to stand here in this Chamber and present members with a budget report which clearly demonstrates that this authority is leading the way in Wales thanks to our sound financial planning and budget management.

I am proud of the way that all our departments have worked extremely hard over the past few years to identify and deliver efficiencies that have helped deliver a range of significant savings.

I am proud of the way that this authority has achieved these savings whilst protecting and maintaining key frontline services in the heart of our communities.

Finally, I am proud to be associated with the professional officers who have put so much time and effort into compiling this detailed budget report that we are considering this evening.

Members have before them a comprehensive set of budget proposals which, I'm sure you will all agree, are a testament to the way this authority has been run over the past few years.

We continue to successfully navigate our way through turbulent financial waters and we have risen to the challenge of ongoing austerity pressures in a planned and measured approach.

Last year you will recall that this authority agreed the lowest Council Tax increase in Wales. I'm delighted to report that we

are in the fortunate position of proposing the same level of increase again this year and I'm sure our residents across the county borough will welcome the fact that we are limiting the Council Tax increase to just 1% for 2017/18.

This equates to just 19p per week for an average band D property. I repeat – just 19p per week.

Looking at the wider budget situation, although the final 2017/18 Financial Settlement was marginally better than anticipated, the additional emerging cost pressures identified in the report has resulted in a net savings requirement of £9.046m.

You will note that £1.8million savings have been brought forward from 2016/17, which again reflects our forward thinking and sound budget planning.

One of the key lines in the report details the £3million 'Nil Impact' savings that have been identified. These proposals consist, in the main, of vacancy management, budget realignment and minor changes to service provision. These will have very little impact on our communities and is a testament to the work that has been going on behind the scenes to deliver savings without affecting frontline services.

You will note that we are proposing that £3.5million should be allocated in the 2017/18 budget to meet ongoing financial pressures for Social Services. This again reflects our ongoing commitment to support and protect the most vulnerable people in our society.

We are also proposing an increase in funding for our schools of 1.25% which equates to £1.334million.

We have again consulted the community and other key stakeholders about our budget proposals, but as you would expect, the response rate was quite low because we are not cutting anything that will have a significant impact on our residents.

Members have also had an opportunity to consider the impact of these budget proposals at the series of special Scrutiny Committees that took place over the past few months and I would like to thank all those who had an input into this process.

As you know, we have pledged that this authority will work hard to protect services, protect staff and protect the vulnerable in the community. It's good to see that we are honouring this pledge with the budget proposals presented this evening. .

That said, it is becoming increasingly evident that the next few years beyond 2017/18 are going to be tough and we are likely to face deeper cuts than we have experienced to date.

Indicative figures for the period 2018/19 to 2021/22 show that we could be looking at a further savings requirement totalling £28.8m. This will inevitably mean that more difficult decisions are needed, but thankfully we are in a strong position to meet these challenges and there is nowhere else in Wales I would rather be than here, in this extremely well-run local authority.

The future landscape also looks set to change considerably with the recent publication of the White Paper on Local Government Reform in Wales.

Whilst we broadly welcome Mark Drakeford's revised approach, it is evident that collaboration and a greater focus on regional working is going to be the way forward for Welsh Local Government.

We need to be at the forefront of this change and ensure that Caerphilly is a key contributor when these new partnership arrangements are being forged.

The Cardiff Capital Region City Deal is also a 'game changer' and this exciting new venture is likely to move forward at a rapid pace now that all 10 councils have formally backed the initiative.

Again, we need to ensure that Caerphilly is a key player in these discussions so that this area enjoys its fair share of benefits resulting from the £1.2billion investment and 25,000 new jobs that will be created under the City Deal.

Members, these budget proposals are fair and well thought out and they put local people first whilst protecting frontline services.

Therefore, I would like to move the recommendations in the report and conclude by thanking all the officers and members who have worked so hard over recent months to deliver this commendable set of budget proposals.

Thank you