

Cllr Keith Reynolds
Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Corporate
Services

Madam Mayor – it gives me great pleasure to present to Council this evening a robust budget that aims to create and protect jobs, stimulate the local economy, protect the vulnerable and minimise the impact of savage government cuts upon our residents.

We have been prudent in terms of ensuring efficiency and value for money, and present today a deliverable, balanced budget which will enable us to maintain key council services and priorities, while also providing us with a firm footing in facing future financial pressures.

Our message is clear – this budget will minimise the impact of severe cuts from the UK Government upon county borough citizens, while also striking a clear, measured balance in protecting key priority areas.

Having a Medium Term Strategy is crucial, and has enabled us to respond in a proactive, not reactive manner to government cuts and the state of the wider economy.

It is for this reason that I would wholeheartedly like to thank our Deputy Chief Executive Mr Nigel Barnett and our Head of Corporate Finance Mrs Nicole Scammell for their excellent work in delivering this balanced budget. I also pay tribute to the leadership of our Chief Executive Mr Anthony O’Sullivan, to our Corporate Directors Mrs Sandra Aspinall and until recently Mr. Albert Heaney and since Mr Dave Street, and to budget holders

across the authority for their commendable work in controlling their budgets.

While we await the findings of the national Comprehensive Spending Review in the summer, the outlook is undoubtedly for further significant cuts up until at least 2017/18 in public spending.

Capital expenditure projections across the country are also nothing short of dire, and the outlook on capital receipts is poor – with little confidence in the market.

This administration however, despite these projections, continues to plan ahead and balance our budgets year on year. We will also consider, taking the projections I mentioned just a moment ago into account, our prudential borrowing arrangements to support key strategic capital projects including Bargoed Cinema and subject to Cabinet and Council approval the brand new Caerphilly Leisure Centre.

This year we became the first council in Wales to implement the Living Wage, which has significantly benefitted more than 3,000 of our lowest paid employees – and subject to members approval, we have financial provision in place to increase the living wage by an additional 25 pence to £7.45 per hour – backdated to 1st November, 2012.

Led by colleague Councillor Gerald Jones we have also made good on our promise to fund the borrowing required to meet our commitment to achieving the Welsh Housing Quality Standard by 2019/20. Good progress is already being made, with more than £5 million of energy efficiency works having already been undertaken on our homes. In addition, £3 million has been spent already on central heating improvements, £2 million on

rewiring and around 500 properties have benefitted from new kitchens and bathrooms which have amounted to more than £3 million.

We have also committed an additional £80,000 to avoid increases in school meals prices to ensure that our children have access to nutritional food, and an additional £100,000 to enhance our youth service provision.

This council has also made a commitment to its residents that we will reintroduce a free-of-charge bulky waste collection service, and as such we have allocated £100,000 in the budget to ensure this important scheme is able to re-commence.

We have also allocated an additional £2.45 million for Social Services, some £1.2 million over and above Welsh Government requirements of £1.25m. This will help ensure that we are able to continue to meet the increasing needs of our most vulnerable residents.

An additional £50,000 is being invested to support our Community Safety initiatives, which will be supplemented by £100,000 as part of our community benefits provision in our housing estates across the county borough. A further £200,000 will also be spent on various carbon reduction initiatives.

This council has also made the commitment to allocate £180,000 to meet the additional administrative burden on Welfare Reform. This will include £70,000 for a mobile Customer First vehicle to help ensure that our isolated communities have access to much needed and regular advice and support services.

We have also allocated more than £2 million of funding for our schools, in line with Welsh Government requirements.

Over the next three years, this Council will also support an ambitious Capital Investment Programme totalling £52.3 million – some £26.5 million over Welsh Government funding. This programme of works, in addition to helping stimulate growth and employment locally, will be used to enhance our existing assets as well as deliver a number of key iconic new facilities.

These facilities include:-

A state-of-the-art £5million cinema and retail development in the heart of Bargoed, which in addition to the wider regeneration works, will help transform the fortunes of this strategic retail destination.

A brand new library and customer services facility in Caerphilly town centre, which will offer in excess of 50,000 resources for residents of the Caerphilly basin and beyond in a comfortable and modern setting.

I cannot of course in mentioning the new Library and Customer Services facility in Caerphilly not refer to the re-opening of Aberbargoed Library in April of this year.

The development of first class sports and leisure facilities including the £6million Ystrad Fawr Centre for Sporting Excellence in partnership with the WRU, Newport Gwent Dragons and Cardiff City FC, and a £10.5million state-of-the-art leisure centre in Caerphilly to replace the current outdated facility, subject to Cabinet and Council approval.

A brand new 21st Century School on the site of the former St Ilan School in Caerphilly, which will help ensure that we are able to accommodate the increasing demand for Welsh medium education for many years to come.

Other significant projects will include the development of new office accommodation at the former Woolworth building in Bargoed, as well as the completion of a new Children's home in Penyrheol and the refurbishment works to bring Blackwood Miners' Institute back to its former glory.

We will also be conducting a £300,000 programme of refurbishment works on Community Centres across the county borough, and will spend £800,000 to enhance our cemetery provision.

The council will also support the implementation of a flood alleviation scheme in Risca, and £12million of investment will be spent to improve our highway infrastructure.

This extensive list is certainly not exhaustive, and we will continue to invest in our communities and we commit to delivering high quality services for all our residents.

In relation to Council Tax, it is this reports recommendation that an increase of 2.35% be introduced. Members will recall that this proposal was agreed in February 2012 as part of the Medium Term Financial Plan.

This increase would equate to an increase of just 40.5 pence per week for a Band D property and would make Caerphilly's council tax increase among the lowest in Wales.

Around 60,000 out of a total number of around 77,000 properties across the Borough are in Bands A, B and C and will, therefore, pay less than 40pence per week.

Unlike the last two budgets put forward by the previous Nationalist Administration which were both about Political self-interest and a cynical attempt to secure Political advantage at the 2011 Welsh assembly election and the 2012 Council elections this budget is about and is in the interests of all of the people and staff of Caerphilly County Borough Council area who we represent.

Madam Mayor, may I conclude by proposing the recommendations of the budget report.

I so move

Cllr Keith Reynolds – 27/02/2013