

## **Annex 4c: Notes from Voluntary Sector Liaison Committee meeting**

### **5. DRAFT BUDGET CONSULTATION**

The Head of Financial Services and S151 Officer delivered a presentation to provide details on the Draft Budget Proposals for 2023/24. The Voluntary Sector Liaison Committee were asked to consider and comment upon the Draft Budget Proposals for 2023/24 prior to Final Budget Proposals being presented to Cabinet and Council later in February.

A representative of the Voluntary Sector sought clarification on the Voluntary Sector Service Level Agreements (SLA) budget realignment as there was no mention of which organisations it applied to and a request was made for it be removed from the 2023/24 draft savings proposals. The Corporate Policy Manager explained that the savings proposal of £25,200 has never been used for the Service Level Agreements and that it is an amount in the total Voluntary Sector budget which has been unallocated for a number of years. The proposal will therefore not result in a cash cut to the current Service Level Agreements and the budget available to support them would be the same in the coming financial year. The Corporate Policy Manager highlighted that the details of the effect of the proposed cut were set out in more detail in the Integrated Impact Assessments that are hyperlinked to the main budget report that had been circulated prior to the meeting. The Committee was informed that the recipient organisations will be contacted very soon to discuss the Service Level Agreements for the next financial year.

The Committee raised concerns regarding the 50% reduction in the subsidy for Caretaker costs in Community Centres and it was suggested that the budget for each individual Community Centre is taken into consideration. In response to the concerns raised, the Head of Public Protection, Community and Leisure Services acknowledged that Community Centres are in different situations, in terms of how they might accommodate the savings proposal, and that some may be in a better position than others. The Committee was advised that at the moment there is a blanket service provision across all of the Community Centres and therefore some reduction is being proposed across the board. Members of the Committee were asked to note this is a part year saving that will allow work to be undertaken in the first half of the financial year with the Community Centres to introduce the proposal. During the course of discussion, further comments were made in relation to the 50% reduction and it was felt that this would mean the closure of many Community Centres across the borough. It was highlighted that Community Centres are also facing huge increases in their fuel costs and despite this many Centres are opening as warm spaces to help the less fortunate in the communities. Cost comparisons were also made with similar Council premises. In conclusion, a representative of the Voluntary Sector offered a number of solutions to help address this matter. These included asking each Community Centre Management Committee if they feel the need to close their Community Centre to help streamline costs and the number of Centres, calculating each Community Centre's caretaking costs to base it on actual usage and floor area instead of the current flat rate of 12 hours, adding details of each Community Centre's weekly programme to the Council's website, and providing each Community Centre with a copy of the three-yearly building condition survey in order for the Management Committees to prioritise improvements and repairs to keep the buildings up to standard.

Concerns were also raised regarding the proposed deletion of the Community Empowerment Fund budget. It was commented that the Community Empowerment Fund has delivered some very useful projects, especially where wards are able to

collaborate, and a request was made for it to continue as it strengthens the rapport between Councillors and their wards. The Corporate Policy Manager reminded the Committee that any underspend on the 2022/23 financial year will be carried forward into the 2023/24 financial year, which would be on a ward basis for the first six months and then pooled for the second six months of the financial year. In conclusion, the Committee requested the Community Empowerment Fund be continued into the future and not just monies rolled over into the next financial year.

A Councillor requested that the proposal to increase the current scale of charges for use of sports pitches by 20% be revisited in the integrated impact assessment. It was noted that the reason behind this was to minimise the impact upon individuals and target team activities, but it was argued that the proposed saving would impact on individuals as it would impact on the ability for the parents to pay for children to take part in teams sports on a regular basis. The Head of Public Protection, Community and Leisure Services clarified that the proposed fee increase relates to team sports, so the total increase would be spread across all participants taking part in team sports. An alternative proposal would be to look more broadly across sport and leisure fee charges and to introduce increases for individual users, which could be suggested as an alternative proposal which would be fed in as part of the budget consultation process.

A representative of GAVO asked how the Voluntary Sector is going to be involved in the process moving forward. In response the Head of Financial Services and S151 Officer re-iterated that as part of the TeamCaerphilly Operating Model, community engagement and collaboration will take place with the Voluntary Sector when working through proposals.

Another Councillor referred to the proposed 50% reduction in the subsidy for Caretaker costs in Community Centres and to the proposed withdrawal of the £10,000 subsidy for Markham Community House and Leisure Centre. A number of concerns were raised including the age profile of members of the Management Committee and difficulties recruiting, paying staff wages and service price increases. It was felt that Markham Community House and Leisure Centre was being treated differently to other areas and the proposal would impact on the facility's ability to continue service at existing levels, which could result in the closure of the facility. The Councillor highlighted that Markham Community House and Leisure Centre is a Council owned building and if the lease for Markham Community House and Leisure Centre is unable to continue, the Council would still be responsible for the repairs and maintenance of the building. A request was made for the reserves to be used for this savings proposal in order to keep Markham Community House and Leisure Centre open. The Head of Public Protection, Community and Leisure Services noted that a discussion has taken place with the Cabinet Member for Waste, Leisure and Green Spaces who is minded to support a change to this proposal so that it would be a £5,000 reduction for 2023/24. Further comments were made in relation to Markham Community House and Leisure Centre being an anomaly within the current Community Centre and Leisure Centre network. The Sport and Leisure Facilities Manager addressed the Committee to provide context in relation to Markham Community House and Leisure Centre and addressed the concerns and comments raised. The Committee was advised that the facility was initially put in place on the very understanding that it would be delivered by a volunteer network and that reactive and statutory maintenance on the Markham Community House and Leisure Centre site is picked up by the Council to significant amounts. It was highlighted that Sport and Leisure Services continue to support the facility by signposting activities.

RESOLVED that the comments of the Voluntary Sector Liaison Committee on the Draft Budget Proposals for 2023/24 prior to Final Budget Proposals being presented to Cabinet and Council be noted.