

SUBJECT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 1 - MONDAY, 4 DECEMBER 2017

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE SUBJECT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 1
HELD IN COUNCIL CHAMBER - CIVIC OFFICES ANGEL STREET BRIDGEND CF31 4WB
ON MONDAY, 4 DECEMBER 2017 AT 9.30 AM**

Present

Councillor CA Webster – Chairperson

JPD Blundell
M Jones

NA Burnett
JC Radcliffe

DK Edwards
B Sedgebeer

J Gebbie
LM Walters

Registered Representatives

W Bond
Rev Canon E J Evans
C Jackson
K Pascoe

Apologies for Absence

RJ Collins, SK Dendy, RM Granville, A Williams and AJ Williams

Officers:

Nicola Echanis	Head of Education & Family Support
Julie Ellams	Democratic Services Officer - Committees
Lindsay Harvey	Corporate Director Education and Family Support
Rachel Keepins	Democratic Services Officer - Scrutiny
Joanne Norman	Finance Manager
Cllr CE Smith	Cabinet Member for Education and Regeneration

18. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor C A Webster declared a prejudicial interest in agenda item 3, Approval of Minutes, and a personal interest in agenda item 5, Medium Term Financial Strategy, as she was the NAS Treasurer and her son had LD and was in receipt of home to school transport.

Mr Kevin Pascoe, Registered Representative, declared a personal interest in agenda item 5, Medium Term Financial Strategy, because he worked for the Central South Consortium as a Casual Consultant Governor (no more than 6 days per annum).

19. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

RESOLVED That subject to the addition of Mr C Jackson under Apologies for Absence, the Minutes of the meeting of the Subject Overview and Scrutiny Committee dated 6th November 2017 be approved as a true and accurate record.

20. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE

The Corporate Director – Operational and Partnership Services submitted a report, the purpose of which was to present the items prioritised by the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee including the next item delegated to this committee. The report also

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listed further potential items for comment and prioritisation and asked the Committee to identify any further items for consideration. The Scrutiny Officer also wanted to clarify detail for the Committee's report to Cabinet on Additional Learning Needs Reform.

A Member referred to the two child practice reviews that had recently taken place and asked for a briefing on each and how the findings impacted on safeguarding. Members discussed the proposed item, "How our schools respond when allegations of sexual assault are made" and agreed that it could be linked with Safeguarding but that it would be better linked to Early Help where there might be a greater opportunity to consider the matter in more detail.

Members recommended that Empty Housing be prioritised for consideration.

Cllr Webster had declared a prejudicial interest in Additional Learning Needs Reform so she left the meeting and Cllr M Jones chaired the meeting.

The Scrutiny Officer referred to the draft ALN Reform report and asked the Committee to clarify if the Committee were recommending that additional funding be requested from Welsh Government or from the education budget to meet the additional costs.

Members agreed that additional funding should be requested from Welsh Government and that the consequences of introducing any new legislation that impacted on budgets, should be considered and funded before being introduced.

Cllr Webster returned to the meeting and took the Chair.

RESOLVED

- 1) The Committee agreed to prioritise the following items for submission to the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee for consideration and delegation back to Subject Committees:
 - School Modernisation Band B
 - Early Help and Social Care
 - Emergency Housing
- 2) The Committee considered the Criteria Form attached at Appendix B and agreed to incorporate this under the item on Safeguarding.

Further to this, Members requested that they receive a briefing on the latest outcomes of Child Practice Reviews.

21. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2018-19 TO 2021-22

The Head of Finance and Section 151 Officer submitted the Medium Term Financial Strategy 2018-19 and 2021-22 for consideration and asked the Committee to consider the information and determine whether it wished to make any comments or recommendations for consolidation and inclusion in the report to Cabinet on the draft budget proposals.

The Interim Corporate Director – Education and Family Support gave a presentation on the Education and Family Support budget headline issues. A 1% efficiency saving had been agreed by Council for 2017/18 across the Council. There was no WG funding to

protect school budgets and there were 13 primary schools and 4 comprehensive schools with a budget deficit.

The Education and Family Support budget was proposed at approximately £108 million for 2018/19 with £88 million delegated to schools, slightly higher than the all-Wales average. Bridgend retained less than the all-wales average for centrally-provided services.

He explained that business plans were required from all schools with either a 5% or £10k deficit and a formal deficit recovery plan had to be submitted which was closely monitored each month.

The Interim Corporate Director – Education and Family Support explained in more detail each saving identified for 2018/19 totalling £630k. He explained that there were significant pressures on home to school transport, out of county placements, ALN provision and the volatile grant situation. There had been a significant increase in the number of pupils with autism and a rise in those with social and emotional behavioural difficulties.

The Interim Corporate Director – Education and Family Support explained that each school was required to have a charging policy in place although schools could not charge for activities that took place during school hours. BCBC was in the process of developing a new legal service for schools service level agreement. Several new requirements would be placed on schools and local authorities by the implementation of the ALN Reform Bill.

The Interim Corporate Director – Education and Family Support reported that the authority was often challenged on the level of funding for schools but the figure could not be compared for a host of reasons. Head Teacher salaries were also covered plus funds to “buy back in” and different calculations were used. He stressed the importance of managing surplus places.

A Member thanked the Interim Corporate Director – Education and Family Support for the useful overview but raised concerns about a 1% efficiency saving. BCBC was traditionally a low funder of schools with funding for primary schools in 21st position out of 22. Secondary schools were fifth from the bottom and schools started with a very low baseline. He was under the impression that the 1% efficiency saving had gone away and that it could cripple schools.

The Cabinet Member for Education and Regeneration explained that the 1% efficiency savings had been taken out of the draft budget for this year but they couldn't make any promises after this year because they did not know how the settlement would look. It was recognised that it would be challenging for the primary schools in particular. He added that it was incorrect to say that Welsh schools were in deficit compared to English schools.

A Member raised concerns about the predicted number of teachers that would be made redundant if the 1% cut went ahead. He was also concerned about the reduction in numbers that would take school dinners if there was an increase in the price of a school meal. He requested further information in terms of profit and loss and school meals.

A Member queried the relationship between 21st Century Schools and the Local Development Plan. The Interim Corporate Director – Education and Family Support replied that his staff worked closely with developers and planning although timing was an issue. A 5 to 7 year programme was in place which identified pressures including traffic issues.

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A Member asked for more information on the aspirations for School Modernisation Band B funding. He was advised that there was a mutual investment 25 year fund to work with developers. There was in the region of £70 million for Band B schools to the west of the county. Work would commence in 2019 with occupation in 2020 at the earliest.

The Cabinet Member for Education and Regeneration commented that when the LDP was compiled, skilled officers considered plans to avoid families being unable to send their children to local schools. This was a difficult job because overall there was capacity within schools but not always in the right places. They were at the mercy of the house builders and a robust LDP would put the authority in a stronger position to deal with this.

A Member asked if ways of saving money such as solar panels were being considered in addition to the income generation. The Head of Education and Family Support explained that she had just commissioned an energy audit including how energy usage within buildings could be reduced.

A Member raised concerns that pupils would not be educated in healthy eating. The Head of Education and Family Support explained that the School catering service had won awards in the past in this area. The service did make a profit and cuts had been made in the past but were not critical at the moment. She shared the committees concerns when it came to the high standards to be maintained.

A Member asked what percentage of food used was locally sourced. The Head of Education and Family Support agreed to find the information and to forward to Members.

A Member asked for more information regarding the increase in costs of Learner Travel due to a re-tender exercise. The Head of Education and Family Support explained that an operator had lost his licence so a re-tender exercise had to be carried out which was more expensive than the original tender. She reminded Members that this was set against savings of more than £750,000 already made.

A Member asked if the reduction to the Central South Education Consortium had been agreed including further reductions in future years and if this had created a problem with other authorities. She also asked about the vision for the future and sharing best practice and how future cuts would impact on this. The Cabinet Member for Education and Regeneration reported that he had a meeting the following day when he would have a better idea of the position other authorities were in. He was concerned regarding value for money but appreciated the value of sharing best practice and it was the right thing to do for the profession.

A Member asked if delegating transport arrangements to special schools was a change of approach. The Member was advised that this was a change and they were working with the schools to ensure any changes were made safely and in the best interests of the pupils.

A Member asked how realistic it would be for the ALN savings of £50,000 to be achieved in light of the requirements coming in under the new ALN Bill. The Head of Education and Family Support explained that this was specific to one arrangement with sensory services delivered across the footprint of the consortia. This would result in a better service funded from the savings made by not replacing a staff member.

A Member referred to the short term nature of grants for early support to children and families and problems retaining and recruiting staff. He asked if this could be addressed with Welsh Government. The Head of Education and Family Support explained that grants were generally part of a five year programme but there were problems this year because the five years were coming to an end. They had received an indicative figure

but were unable to agree any contracts until they received confirmation. Talks were underway regarding funding flexibility and looking at people rather than post codes

A Member asked if there was a plan in place following Brexit. The Head of Education and Family Support explained that funds were guaranteed to the end of 2019 and a plan was being developed on how to fund the services after that date.

A Member referred to the “Festival of Learning” and asked if £65,000 could be put to better use elsewhere. Pioneer schools should be promoting best practice so was there a need for this. The Interim Corporate Director – Education and Family Support explained that the day would include a full range of activities and could achieve more than the Central South Consortium or Pioneer Schools. Every school would be involved bringing in all schools staff and learners. There would be a range of workshops, post 16 development opportunities and online case studies to share with other authorities. If the day was a success then foundations could be put in place to look at income generation going forward. The outcomes included up to 1000 teachers engaged in a learning opportunity, on line case study, engaging more learners and wellbeing.

The Cabinet Member for Education and Regeneration reinforced what had been said and added that HMI had shown interest in the initiative. This would provide very good value for money and provide an opportunity for secondary teachers to meet and share secrets.

A Member asked if planning for the event had begun and raised concerns that only 0.6% of learners would be involved and that plans were underway even though the budget for the event had not been agreed. She was advised that the deadline for contributions was 29th March and feedback to date was impressive because schools could see the value in it. They were actively engaging pupils at all levels and event planning had to start at an early stage. If funding was not available then the event could be paired back. Members asked for feedback following the event to see what outcomes had been achieved and suggested changing the title for corporate documentation.

A Member asked if the recovery plans prepared by schools with a deficit balance included cutting staff as a solution. The Finance Manager reported that some schools had included staffing cuts, restructures, changing activities and not replacing staff when they leave although these plans were not significant at the moment.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Following the Committee’s consideration of the draft budget proposals for the Education Directorate, Members determined to make the following recommendations to go forward to Cabinet:
2. The Committee recommend that in order for Members to support the Festival of Learning proposed budget growth there needs to be clear objectives and outcomes in order to see what is going to be achieved from this one-off investment.
3. The Committee recommend that the Authority lobby Welsh Government to consider longer term budget planning to enable Local Authorities to better plan for the future and have security of funding for projects and priorities.
4. The Committee recommend that the Authority ensure that strong links are made between any future investment for

schools and the current and future Local Development Plan with closer working relationships with all those involved. This is in line with the requirements of the Wellbeing and Future Generations (Wales) Act in terms of how decisions taken now should be taking account of the longer term impact on future generations.

5. The Committee recommend that early and serious consideration be given to the proposals for future Education cuts of a 1% efficiency saving from 2019-20 onwards including evidence of potential impact and how schools and the Local Authority can plan to minimise this impact on schools, staff and most importantly on pupil performance.

Additional Information

- The Committee also requested the following additional information:
- The Outturn figures for catering indicating profit and loss for the last 3 years including information outlining whether the price increase each year outweighs the loss due to a reduction in uptake.
- Details of delegated and non-delegated funding , per pupil – to see comparisons and clarify the evidence over the Authority being funded 17 out of 22 for secondary schools and 21 out of 22 for primary schools.
- Whether or not the schools catering service is sourcing local products.
- Clarification of the number of pupils with an ASD who are in receipt of support from the Pupil Development Grant.

The Committee requested that the feedback from the School Budget Forum following its meeting next week be presented to both BREP and the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee for consideration in development of their recommendations.

22. URGENT ITEMS

None

The meeting closed at 12.35 pm