

CORPORATE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - FRIDAY, 24 JANUARY 2020

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE CORPORATE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD IN COUNCIL CHAMBER, CIVIC OFFICES ANGEL STREET BRIDGEND CF31 4WB ON FRIDAY, 24 JANUARY 2020 AT 09:30

Present

Councillor CA Green – Chairperson

S Aspey	TH Beedle	JPD Blundell	NA Burnett
N Clarke	RJ Collins	PA Davies	SK Dendy
DK Edwards	A Hussain	M Jones	MJ Kearns
JR McCarthy	AA Pucella	JC Radcliffe	KL Rowlands
RMI Shaw	JC Spanswick	RME Stirman	T Thomas
JH Tildesley MBE	E Venables	MC Voisey	LM Walters
KJ Watts	A Williams	AJ Williams	

Apologies for Absence

MC Clarke, HJ David, P Davies, J Gebbie, T Giffard, DG Howells, DRW Lewis, JE Lewis, RL Penhale-Thomas, B Sedgebeer, SG Smith, G Thomas, CA Webster, DBF White and JE Williams

Officers:

Mark Galvin	Senior Democratic Services Officer - Committees
Lindsay Harvey	Corporate Director Education and Family Support
Gill Lewis	Interim Head of Finance and Section 151 Officer
Rachel Pick	Scrutiny Officer
Zak Shell	Head of Neighbourhood Services
Mark Shephard	Chief Executive
Kevin Stephens	Democratic Services Assistant
Tracy Watson	Scrutiny Officer
Kelly Watson	Chief Officer Legal, HR and Regulatory Services

Invitees:

Councillor Dhanisha Patel	Cabinet Member for Wellbeing and Future Generations
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16. ELECTION OF CHAIRPERSON

It was moved; duly seconded and carried unanimous, that Councillor Spanswick be nominated as Chairperson for the meeting.

RESOLVED: That Councillor JC Spanswick be elected Chairperson for the combined meeting of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Subject Overview and Scrutiny Committees 1, 2 and 3.

17. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

18. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2020-21 TO 2023-24

The Chairperson welcomed to the meeting the Invitees.

The Chief Executive gave a brief introduction of the report, following which he invited questions from Members.

A Member referred to page 5 of the report and in terms of policy context, he pointed out that some of the Council's varying financial pressures related to new legislation and regulations imposed upon it by Welsh Government. These included for example, the Welsh Language Act regulations and obligations imposed by the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act. The likes of these and others were often not funded by Welsh Government, so therefore he asked if representations were being made to the likes of them, Central Government and the WLGA etc., to ensure that an appropriate level of funding was made available to BCBC resource these.

The Chief Executive advised that the Leader regularly corresponded with Ministers in order to attempt to secure funding to financially support new legislative requirements imposed upon local authorities along the lines of those referred to above. On occasions Welsh Government would advise that extra resource had been provided in local authority settlements in order to exercise its right to fulfil obligations imposed upon them through new legislative requirements. Alternatively, sometimes no extra funding was provided and local authorities were instead required to provide this as part of its existing resources. He acknowledged however, that this was a problem in that if no such funding was provided, this was an ongoing continual burden for not just BCBC but other local authorities also.

The Council had to fulfil all of its functions in respect of new regulations, rules and legislation however, whether these came with funding or not as failure to do so, would result in a situation of non-compliance when the Council were audited on different elements of its work and performance by the Wales Audit Office.

The Interim Head of Finance and S 151 Officer added that funding from Welsh Government was sometimes allocated and sometimes not. An example of this, was that it had financially supported the Authority in relation to Health and Social Care but not on Additional Learning Needs (ALN) which had as a consequence, pressurised the Council's budget.

A Member referred to Appendix B of the report and the Budget Reduction Proposals in respect of the current term of the MTFs in respect of Home to School Transport. She felt that this should be looked at more closely in conjunction to Safe Routes to Schools, in order to ensure that transport for children was continued where there did not exist a safe route to any school and conversely, consider reducing Home to School transport provision where there existed such Safe Routes to Schools. She added, that cuts should not be made where there was a considerable demand of pupils relying on school transport, wherever possible. An example of this, was at Coity Primary School where due to the absence of a safe walking route to school, some pupils were provided with home to school transport.

The Corporate Director – Education and Family Support recognised the importance of the above, as well as the need to consider the location for the new build of schools when considering neighbouring large new housing developments it served and the wider catchment area as a whole. He advised that the Education Department worked closely with the the Council's Highways and Planning Departments regarding both this and the provision of Safe Routes to Schools, which local authorities had to provide if/where required, in accordance with relevant legislation.

A Member felt that it was also important to closely consider providing enough sufficient places at new Schools (Band B) (as well as Safe Routes to Schools), for the area it served and this was something that could be considered as part of the evolvment of the Council's Local Development Plan.

The Cabinet Member – Education and Regeneration added that Active Travel also had a part to play in relation to the above.

The Cabinet Member – Communities advised that BCBC had been successful in its bid(s) for grant funding for Active Travel in order to encourage a form of travelling that will aid the health and wellbeing of people, as opposed to them travelling by bus or car etc. Active Travel could also connect vast areas of the County Borough either by foot or through cycle paths.

A Member referred to EFS41 of Appendix B, where reference was made to the proposal of pursuing full cost recovery of Post 16 transport. She felt that this might disadvantage people living in the more deprived locations of the County Borough, such as the valley and more rural areas, in their consideration of pursuing further vocational and higher education qualifications in schools and colleges.

The Corporate Director – Education and Family Support reminded Members, that a consultation exercise had just concluded on Post 16 Education and Home to School Transport, with the cost for the provision of the latter being in the region of £500k per year which was significantly contributing to a Directorate overspend that needed to be addressed, in order for the Education Department to achieve a balanced budget. He added further that he had an obligation to protect his statutory services and Post 16 Transport was a non-statutory service area. As this budget area was not due to face cuts until 2021-22, the time in between gave the Education Authority time to work with transport providers, the Bridgend College and certain other stakeholders, with the view of looking at ways of cutting existing costs, in order to attempt to maintain some elements of transport currently provided.

A Member referred to EFS33, where reference was made to the proposal to remove Escorts on primary school transport services where there were fewer than 8 pupils travelling. She considered this to be a risk and therefore asked how this would be mitigated.

The Corporate Director – Education and Family Support acknowledged this, adding that some learner's required specific transport in order to cater for their needs and this form of transport would remain escorted, as it was a statutory duty to do so, i.e. for ALN pupils etc. Wherever possible the Council would look to mitigate the risk by reducing the number of young people travelling in a vehicle at any one time, as well as it ensuring that every transporting vehicle is looked at on its merits case by case, but ensuring that Health and Safety legislation is not compromised in terms of the safety of learners. He further added that the savings required in this area were also currently indicative, so they could also be subject to change.

A Member referred to EFS56 and the proposal to the removal of the Statementing Team, as the ALN Act moves to the development of Independent Development Plans by schools. She asked if this proposal has been delayed to 2021-22.

The Corporate Director – Education and Family Support confirmed that this proposal was tentative at present, as it was still not known fully what the changes the ALN Act would introduce. It was felt that some changes would impact on Statementing for those individuals with SEN and would also increase the workload for Educational Psychologists.

The Member asked would this result in Statementing taking longer to process, to which the Corporate Director – Education and Family Support replied that this may or not be

the case. He added however, that it was a statutory duty for the Statements to be fully processed and completed in 26 weeks.

A Member referred to EFS54, and a proposal for a further reduction to the contribution to the Central South Consortium. She asked how this would impact the Council's Education budget.

The Cabinet Member – Education and Regeneration advised that the overall impact on the Education annual budget would be a reduction in just under £100k.

The Corporate Director – Education and Family Support, added that this reduction would have an effect on back office staff and not impact in terms of a budget reduction on schools per se. He added further, that though it was indicated in the report, Appendix (B) that this would amount to a total 10% budget reduction, this had now been modified to 3%.

A Member referred to EFS57, a further review of staffing structures across the Education and Family Support Directorate and asked if this review had yet been conducted.

The Corporate Director – Education and Family Support advised that this review affected the entire Directorate and proposals regarding this would be the subject of a report to CMB in April. He envisaged the changes would be minimal and that it would largely involve not filling staff vacancies and possibly voluntary early retirement/redundancies.

A Member noted from SSW19, 20 and 22 that the Council were looking as part of savings, to review the partnership Contract with Halo, as well as reducing the hours of services provided in Leisure Centres and Libraries. She felt that this would reduce culture within the County Borough, as well as compromising the health and wellbeing of residents in the BCB.

The Head of Adult Social Care confirmed that reduced hours in Leisure Centres and Libraries would be minimal in terms of any impact on the current services provided in these areas. Budget reductions imposed on the Social Services Directorate however, meant that some efficiency savings had to be made, though these were very small when in terms of percentages when comparing with the overall size of the Directorate's budget.

A Member referred to SSW29, relating to a further review of staffing structures across areas of Adults and Childrens Services. He was concerned with this, particularly in relation to Social Workers where there was historically some difficulty in recruiting and retaining these professionals. Caseloads were also remaining the same, or even increasing, so he hoped the pressure of work in this very important service area would not be compromised by any potential restructuring proposals.

The Head of Adult Social Care, advised that the case loads of all Social Workers had to be met within prescribed timelines including in accordance with legislation, therefore they were very much protected. This was particularly important, as the work related to some of the most vulnerable in society.

A Member asked how long the Contract remained between BCBC and Halo in terms of this organisation continuing the running of leisure facilities.

The Chief Executive advised that the Contract commenced in 2012 and would end in 2026/27.

A Member referred to COM26, investigating the introduction of charging for users of the Shopmobility facility in Bridgend town centre, in order to reduce/remove the current level of subsidy, otherwise closure of the facility will be necessary. He felt that this service should remain in some kind of capacity, as both the disabled and the elderly relied upon it. He had spoken to some users of the service and confirmed that the feedback he had received, reflected that they would be acceptable of an increase in charges.

The Chief Executive advised that the Shopmobility service had been the subject of a report to Cabinet this week where it had been agreed that in accordance with an element of saving required under the Council's MTFS, the hours of the service be reduced as well as a daily charge of £3 being introduced for the service going forward. A consultation had been previously undertaken, the feedback from which had confirmed that such proposals were not strongly opposed by users. This was a reasonable compromise he felt, in order to make the necessary savings required whilst still maintaining the service.

A Member referred to Comm42 and 42a, the review of parks and playing fields services and the transfer of pitches/pavilions through Community Asset Transfer (CAT), respectively, and he asked if sufficient financial and staffing resources were to be made available to support Clubs and Organisations who wish to pursue the taking over of assets through CAT.

The Cabinet Member – Communities advised that there were proposals to invest in both extra staffing and funding to support CAT (for Clubs, etc.) and the Interim Head of Finance and S151 Officer added, that £500k would be set aside for the latter in earmarked reserves.

In response to a further Members question, the Cabinet Member – Communities confirmed that the savings earmarked in 2020-21 and 2021-22 would be made, even if they took longer to be realised than was estimated.

A Member referred to proposals to reduce CCTV coverage particularly in respect of footfall cameras in our towns and asked, if discussions had taken place with the Police and any other stakeholders, with the view of seeking some joint funding to maintain current provision.

The Chief Executive confirmed that BCBC wished for the Police and Crime Commissioner to make a contribution to the provision of CCTV in public places including for town centre events. However, to date this had not been agreed to. The Council were also now looking to possibly work with other local authorities to provide CCTV collaboratively. The equipment at the Council's main CCTV Unit at Bryncethin Depot also required upgrading, so further expense would be required sometime in the future to make provision for such new equipment. He added that it was reasonable to consider a multi-agency approach to the provision of CCTV, including input from the Police, as this helped in reducing crime and anti-social behaviour in not just towns, but other communities.

The Deputy Leader added that the Council would also continue requesting Welsh Government for assistance in funding CCTV provision to help protect the safety of the public.

As this concluded debate on this item, the Chairperson thanked all Invitees for attending the meeting and positively responding to questions from Members, following which they retired from the meeting.

Recommendations:

Following the Committee's consideration of the draft budget proposals for the authority, Members determined to make the following comments and recommendations:

In relation to EFS41 the Committee expressed concern at the proposal to seek the full cost recovery of Post 16 transport as it believed its removal would impact on the economy and disadvantage pupils living in rural areas and in valley communities from accessing post 16 education due to the distances they would have to travel to attend lessons. The Combined Overview and Scrutiny Committee requested that Cabinet consider the removal of this budget reduction proposal from the Medium Term Financial Strategy until such time as the consultation on post 16 education had been completed.

In relation to budget reduction proposal EFS33 that Cabinet consider not removing escorts on primary school service with fewer than 8 pupils on the grounds of safety to the pupils, to protect the drivers of home to school transport and in the interest of road safety.

In relation to budget reduction proposal CEX19 a request be made to the Police and Crime Commissioner that the police consider making a contribution towards the funding of the CCTV service due to the use of CCTV footage by the police in detecting crime and in securing convictions. That the Authority explore working collaboratively with other local authorities on the provision of the CCTV service.

That the Authority continue to lobby the Welsh Government through the Welsh Local Government Association to fully fund the cost of legislative changes in order to alleviate those pressures and new responsibilities placed on local government to deliver the Welsh Government's agenda.

The Committee expressed that other agencies, particularly the NHS were not co-operating with the Authority in publicising the EU Settlement Scheme and requested that the Chief Executive raise this matter through the Public Service Board and Regional Partnership Board. Additionally, the Committee requested that the Chief Executive write to the Welsh Government requesting that it undertakes a media campaign to publicise the EU Settlement Scheme to encourage citizens to register to become UK citizens.

19. URGENT ITEMS

None.

The meeting closed at 11:10