

CORPORATE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - THURSDAY, 21 JANUARY 2021

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE CORPORATE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
HELD REMOTELY VIA SKYPE ON THURSDAY, 21 JANUARY 2021 AT 10:00**

Present

Councillor CA Green – Chairperson

TH Beedle	JPD Blundell	MC Clarke	N Clarke
RJ Collins	PA Davies	SK Dendy	DK Edwards
J Gebbie	T Giffard	DG Howells	A Hussain
M Jones	MJ Kearns	JE Lewis	RL Penhale-Thomas
AA Pucella	KL Rowlands	RMI Shaw	JC Spanswick
MC Voisey	LM Walters	KJ Watts	DBF White
PJ White	A Williams	AJ Williams	JE Williams

Apologies for Absence

SE Baldwin, P Davies, DRW Lewis, B Sedgebeer, E Venables and CA Webster

Officers:

Jackie Davies	Head of Adult Social Care
Nicola Echanis	Head of Education & Family Support
Deborah Exton	Interim Deputy Head of Finance
Meryl Lawrence	Senior Democratic Services Officer - Scrutiny
Gill Lewis	Interim Chief Officer – Finance, Performance and Change
Claire Marchant	Corporate Director Social Services and Wellbeing
Martin Morgans	Head of Performance and Partnership Services
Chris Morris	Accountant
Janine Nightingale	Corporate Director - Communities
Andrew Rees	Democratic Services Manager
Zak Shell	Head of Neighbourhood Services
Tracy Watson	Scrutiny Officer
Kelly Watson	Chief Officer Legal, HR and Regulatory Services

Invitees:

Councillor Nicole Burnett	Cabinet Member Social Services and Early Help
Councillor Huw David	Leader
Councillor Dhanisha Patel	Cabinet Member for Wellbeing and Future Generations
Mark Shephard	Chief Executive
Councillor Hywel Williams	Deputy Leader
Councillor Richard Young	

203. ELECTION OF CHAIRPERSON

RESOLVED: That Councillor C Green be elected as Chairperson of the Combined Meeting of all Scrutiny Committees in relation to Item 4, in respect of Social Services and Wellbeing and the Chief Executives Directorate.

204. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

205. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2021-22 TO 2024-25

The Interim Chief Officer – Finance, Performance and Change presented an overview of the report, the purpose of which was to present the Committee with the draft Medium Term Financial Strategy 2021-22 to 2024-25, which set out the spending priorities of the Council, key investment objectives and budget areas targeted for necessary savings. The strategy included a financial forecast for 2021-2025 and a detailed draft revenue budget for 2021-22.

The Chair thanked the Interim Chief Officer Finance, Performance and Change for her concise overview of the report. Members asked the following questions:

Social Services and Wellbeing Directorate

A Member noted that the report had two Appendices, one containing Budget Pressures and one with Budget Reduction Proposals. For Social Services and Wellbeing (SSWB) there were pressures proposed of £5m, yet on the budget savings, the total was about a tenth. It was well known that Social Services and Wellbeing was a reactive department and could see overspends by some £2m. He asked Officers to comment on the disparity between the two figures.

The Interim Chief Officer Finance, Performance and Change acknowledged that SS&W was a demand lead service and there was constant pressure on the budget. There were lots of pieces of work in progress to control that demand, but this was one of the services severely affected by Covid-19. There were opportunities that should enable more efficiencies to be delivered, but that would take time. The savings and the pressures were not necessarily linked, they were for different reasons, so there would continue to be pressures, but that didn't stop opportunities to deliver savings.

The Corporate Director - Social Services and Wellbeing advised that this had been a year like no other. Social Services and Wellbeing was a demand lead service and was statutorily responsive to the needs of individuals and the communities served. Practice had been transformed over a number of years, working in a strength-based way, focussing on what people could do. People with very high level of needs of care and support were connected into communities and had their outcomes met in ways which didn't mean they were as reliant on traditional care and support services. There were reductions in the number of people who had come into care homes, because of investment in reablement services and this was one of the areas of savings. Opportunities to provide daytime occupation and opportunities for people, were seen very differently. It didn't mean that the pressures went away but they related both to quantum of service provided, which linked to the demographics. There was an ageing population which brought with it an increased requirement for some, for care and support and that was reflected in the budget pressures. In addition, this related to the cost of service provision. The social care workforce had been at the fore of the response and the value of the workforce, had been recognised in the budget pressures in terms of the uplift. There had been increasing creativity during the pandemic. Direct payments had been used flexibly for both children and adults with care and support needs, to control their own support needs, and those were reflected in the pressures. There would continue to be transformation in terms of the services provided while continuing to build on the strengths that enabled things to be done more cost effectively, which is why there were savings in terms of practice and in terms of day opportunities, highlighted in the MTFS.

The Cabinet Member for Social Services and Early Help offered her assurance to Members that this was a period of positive transformation. Officers were forward thinking and experienced and were working on evidenced based changes, but had not seen the

benefit of savings that had been identified. There were new grant funding streams coming online all the time, from Welsh Government (WG) and it was about responding to them and what the new funding priorities were going to be from WG. The team were responding to pressures that were completely unknown and now, due to long Covid-19, there would be social care pressures from much younger adults. There was just no idea what the demands on the service were going to be.

A Member referred to page 43, SSW3 and made reference to the National Living Wage and asked for clarification whether this was the real or the foundation living wage, and whether terms and conditions of all commissioned services would be implemented under the ethical procurement and workforce partnership council.

The Corporate Director - Social Services and Wellbeing confirmed to the Member that this was based on the national living wage. The remuneration of the Social Care Sector was an issue receiving significant attention from WG at the moment. A White Paper was out for consultation which set out some of the challenges the Social Care Sector faced, recognising there needed to be some stepped changes in the way services were commissioned going forward. At a national Welsh Government level, it was recognised that there needed to be some sustainable investment in public services to address the issues being faced. The Workforce Strategy for Health and Social Care talked about working towards parity of esteem with the NHS within a 5 year period however this was a challenging proposition. She gave assurances that in relation to services commissioned the Local Authority worked largely to the principles set out in the White Paper. There was an understanding that at a national level there were significant policy issues, which remained unresolved, and which the White Paper would start to garner views, in terms of a resolution.

The Member did not feel the question had been answered. She asked for a guarantee in terms of commissioned services, that all staff and all contractors should be paid the foundation living wage.

The Corporate Director - Social Services and Wellbeing advised that at the moment she could not give a guarantee, as that was not what was reflected in the MTFS proposals being scrutinised. The MTFS proposals were based on the national living wage.

A Member referred to page 39, SSW2 and asked for clarity on the figure as it covered a multitude of areas and wanted to know how much related to Direct Payments.

The Corporate Director - Social Services and Wellbeing explained that the entirety of the pressure related to Direct Payments. The reference to complexity was because that in addition to an increase in the quantum there was complexity of casework. The challenges faced meant there was a need to be flexible within the capacity and capabilities, which had led to an increase in the use of Direct Payments, to give flexibility to individuals to secure their support in a way which worked for them. She felt the descriptor was correct as it was both about an increase in the number of Direct Payments and the complexity of needs that those Direct Payments were supporting.

The Member noted that the figure was in the recurring column, but was not shown across future years.

The Interim Chief Officer Finance, Performance and Change explained that the figure would not go over each of the years, it was put in once, and it went into the base budget.

A Member referred to Page 39, SSW3 and stated that there was a big question about commissioning contracts. When they were introduced it was down to a financial saving, as people weren't getting paid the national minimum wage. He noted it was £429k for

CORPORATE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - THURSDAY, 21 JANUARY 2021

2020-21 and then a recurring amount. He felt there needed to be a serious review in terms of commissioned contracts to start looking at cooperative models, insourcing, etc. as this was not the only way. He felt that it sounded like it was not actually saving money, which was the idea when it was introduced.

The Corporate Director - Social Services and Wellbeing confirmed that one of the strategic priorities was to review the way Domiciliary Care was commissioned. In common with many other authorities, the Local Authority was looking to move towards a more outcome-focused way of commissioning that would challenge some of the traditional ways based on task and time. There had been innovation and creativity seen during the pandemic with groups of providers working together. She had talked earlier about outcome focussed and strength based practice, which needed to be reflected in the way services were commissioned. This would give care workers, who saw things on the frontline, the flexibility they needed. The relationships with providers in Bridgend meant that when the Local Authority came to the formal recommissioning of domiciliary care provision, it would be in a good place to move to a different model.

The Cabinet Member for Social Services and Early Help explained that it was her ambition, and that of Cabinet, that procurement look at other outcomes, other than financial, including community benefits, social benefits, the focus on the individual and the communities being served. That was definitely something being considered and she was questioning this at every point. She was committed to making sure that outsourced domiciliary care workers were paid a good living wage as they were really important community members with many working long hours. She noted it impacted on women in particular, something the crisis had shown.

The Chairperson agreed with the Cabinet Member and stated that these people were some of the most important workers, particularly during this pandemic, and certainly should be paid exactly what they should be entitled to.

The Member fully accepted and appreciated what the Cabinet Member had said but felt it needed to be clear what people were being paid in these contracts, as it didn't sound like it was in line with that committed to by the Council.

The Chairperson stated that it was hoped that from here on in all contracts would ensure categorically, that everyone gets paid what they are entitled to be paid and what they should be paid.

A Member asked if agency staff had been used during the pandemic, where staff had been sick, and what was the cost.

The Corporate Director – Social Services and Wellbeing confirmed that agency workforce had been used. This pandemic had impacted hugely on frontline staff, in terms of the nature of their work. They had become exposed to the virus, because they lived and worked in the same communities. People had become unwell themselves and some had been required to self-isolate, so that had meant the need to bring agency workforce. The Council had benefited from the social care hardship fund to support the sector. There had been additional money to go into both domiciliary care and to residential care providers, to enable them to offset the impact of those additional costs around their workforce and additional costs they had incurred.

The Member stated that she would still like to have costings, if possible, in respect of agency staff and what wage they were on. Were they in parity with local authority staff; were they getting more or getting less?

A Member referred to page 42, SSW1 and the £90k saving. Whilst it was only 3% of the budget, before things like this could be agreed he felt the Committee needed to know what was the impact and what were the alternative methods of service delivery.

The Head of Adult Social Care explained that Members would recall previous Scrutiny reports on the review of daytime opportunities alongside the prevention and wellbeing agenda. The pandemic has stopped some of those plans in terms of community resilience. The overall delivery of daytime opportunities was still being looked at and constantly reviewed, with the experience over the last 10 months, reshaping how that would be done. In terms of the £90k, what had been done was to look at current budget levels, in those areas, and where there were vacancies, reduce the budgets without any direct impact on service delivery. This would be achievable in the next financial year.

The Member asked if the £90k was a staff saving and what those staff were doing before and was that work going to be added to other peoples.

The Head of Adult Social Care explained to the Member that she could come back to the Member with a fuller explanation but these were vacancies being held within the service.

The Leader stated that it was important for Members to know that the demand for day services had changed. Part of this reflected the pressures talked about earlier in terms of direct payments. It had been seen that some residents were choosing to use direct payments instead, to pay for services they managed themselves. This had enabled the structure of those day services to change. The service had evolved over the years, savings and efficiencies made, but it had also responded to different demands from service users, which was important. He suggested that more information could be brought back to Members on that.

A Member referred to how the demand for day services had changed and wondered what savings/impact that was having on the day-care centre?

The Leader explained that during the pandemic day services had continued to be delivered, but in a different way, with support directed to many of those residents at home, which had brought different pressures. In terms of more long-term service changes, better outcomes had been delivered for some of those residents, because they were more independent, with some taking up employment opportunities, and they had been happier with the outcomes. Efficiency savings had already been made in the day service, with a rationalised number of sites and continuing with the re-configuration of the staffing structure, to reflect this. It was crucial to stress that people were still being supported, but in a different. Some people wanted to go to one place and do the same activities but other people wanted more personalised and individual activities, and that was what was being delivered and provided to them.

In respect of supporting people in the community, the Member asked whether this was residents that were having direct payments and were actually paying for that support, or were they having that support through social services.

The Head of Adult Social Care explained there had been a significant change journey in daytime opportunities within Adult Social Care and that in excess of £1m had been saved over the last 6 years. A significant amount had been done in enhancing community developments, some through active support through social services. Some of this was about promoting independence because people were able to access what they needed within the community. There wasn't a one model fits all, because everyone had different needs. There was now 10 months experience of delivering something different in communities and supporting people in lots of different ways. Currently, the service was reflecting on what had happened by talking to people who had been

supported and looking at the model, in terms of that. There could be significant changes, or small changes, some could be through direct payments, but that was just one option out of a number currently being considered.

The Member thanked the Head of Adult Social Care for her explanation and asked what was the future of the Bridgend Resource Centre.

The Head of Adult Social Care explained that this was one of the flagship buildings in terms of what was delivered there, currently very specialist care and she would like that to continue in terms of enhancing that specialist care and potentially as a hub with other partners. There was a need for some specialist places in order to support some people with the most complex needs, including individuals with learning disability and dementia, so that would be some of the modelling being done over the next couple of months.

The Corporate Director - Social Services and Wellbeing explained there had been massive innovation and creativity, over the years, and building on that, it was important to work with people with learning disabilities and other disabilities and families and carers, in designing those services of the future. Most people with learning disabilities wanted to work and contribute. There were some fantastic schemes, which could be built on, and it was important not to give a blueprint today, but that this was done alongside the people who actually used the services.

A Member asked how direct payments were monitored and reviewed.

The Corporate Director – Social Services and Wellbeing explained that they were audited, from a financial point of view, in the same way that everybody who had care and support, needed a plan, and had at least an annual review from their social worker. They were reviewed that way in terms of the review of the care plan as well.

A Member referred to Page 42, SSW2 and explained that he could not see how the narrative related to the budget reductions being proposed and asked how the narrative related to the figures.

The Corporate Director - Social Services and Wellbeing explained that these were difficult ones because they didn't relate to a specific service, building or members of staff. The savings were built up accumulatively from working in the strength-based way, supporting people with care and support in different ways, which meant, accumulatively, less money was spent. By working with individuals to understand what matters to them, it could be they would rather access a community centre or community hub, during the day, reducing the number of domiciliary care calls they have a day. They are happier and have better outcomes and there is some reduction in the budget. As a result there could be a 100 people who have similar adjustments to their care plan, building on the strength-based way. It was difficult to list all those individual changes.

The Member explained that he understood what the Corporate Director - Social Services and Wellbeing was saying, but asked why are they red for the subsequent two years.

The Corporate Director – Social Services and Wellbeing explained that they were red because of the uncertainty in terms of coming through the Covid-19 period and what had been seen was quite unusual in terms of the way care and support was provided. There was a significant reduction of placements in care homes, which was understandable and an increase in complexity of care and support within the community because people were remaining within their own homes. While there was hope for the vaccine to be rolled out and that WG could reduce restrictions, it was not known how long this would take so the impact of that on people with care and support needs could not be planned as well as normally.

The Cabinet Member for Social Services and Early Help explained that the Local Authority had set out before the Covid-19 crisis to really start pushing the convention agenda, co-production, working with communities, through transformation funding. Covid-19 had put everything on hold and that way of working was not possible until people could start getting together again. The unknowns that had come out of Covid-19 could not be underestimated and so the budget reduction proposals had to remain red.

A Member stated that he was not clear at all on SSW2 and felt that the narrative needed greater clarity.

A Member thanked the Corporate Director - Social Services and Wellbeing for her comments but did not feel she could actually make any proposals based on the documentation provided, as there was nothing to make any recommendations on.

The Corporate Director – Social Services and Wellbeing stated that she took on board the comments about needing to be far clearer in the explanatory notes exactly what was meant and that hopefully her earlier explanation supported what was being proposed. Direct payments was part of that solution but there was always more that needed to be done to develop the community models. She drew Members attention that there was a very ambitious set of proposals from Bridgend partners, to build on all the good work that had already been done and to take the local authority to the next level, in terms of transformation but money next year would be less than anticipated and that would create partners across Bridgend, real challenges, in terms of delivering on this agenda. There was a need to look at revised business cases, which could be brought to Scrutiny, to deliver on these objectives which adds to the red RAG rating which was already indicated due to Covid-19.

A Member asked if there was any way to improve communications, without betraying any form of confidentiality so that the public could get a greater understanding of what the Directorate provided. There was a perception that the Council precept was used to collect waste, to look after the roads, etc., when in fact a large amount of public money was being spent on looking after vulnerable people.

A Member, explaining her own experience, asked whether the Local Authority was up to date with all reviews for complex cases because it was one way of saving a huge amount of money.

The Cabinet Member for Social Services and Early Help agreed with the previous Member and said that the Directorate had stepped up its positive communications over the last year but there was always room for positive stories showing exactly what was being done.

The Chief Executive fully agreed with the Communications challenge and hoped that it had not gone un-noticed that Communications had significantly stepped up over the last year to ensure that both Members and the public had a stream of communications and press releases. The challenge was a challenge for all, including Directors and elected Members, not just the Communications Team. There was clearly a deficit in terms of understanding e.g. people didn't understand how much a care package costs in the same way they didn't understand it costs £5k a year to send a child to school for a year. There was a need to be more straightforward and get those messages out to the public so they had a greater understanding about the pressures on the Local Authority and some of the statutory requirements, where money needed to be found.

The Corporate Director - Social Services and Wellbeing stated that in relation to communications there was such an opportunity, post Covid-19, because people were

valuing and recognising the contribution of the social care workforce alongside the health workforce, and she would redouble efforts with Communications colleagues to make sure that what actually happened on the ground was understood and communicated. In terms of reviews, work was always being done in this area in an integrated way with health colleagues. Some placements were expensive, both in Adults and Children's services. The Local Authority operated from quite an efficient base in Bridgend, with the number of children and young people out of area residential placements being low, compared to the rest of Wales. That meant, in terms of the budget, further efficiencies were not available but there were some very high cost, complex situations, that were being reviewed constantly and were always in discussions with colleagues to ensure those were being taken forward and reviewed in the right person centred way with partners.

The Interim Chief Officer Finance, Performance and Change endorsed everything that was being said and there had never been a better time, in respect of communication with the general public and stakeholders, with the huge focus on social care. The Local Authority had sent out leaflets and budget books in the traditional way, and had tried hard to be innovative in connecting with people, who perhaps, in some cases, were not interested, in what the Council did. She would look at how digitally opportunity could be captured and see how better information on some statutory services could be provided. It was one of the top three that came back from the budget consultation, so perhaps a little bit more information would be helpful.

The Deputy Leader stated that greater awareness of the budget had been a real central theme in what he had tried to achieve. He would welcome constructive dialogue on how to get that message across with greater clarity of what was provided to the public.

A Member asked where the Local Authority was in terms of assessments with all the added problems surrounding Covid-19.

The Head of Adult Social Care agreed to come back with the figures/details on that.

The Chairperson advised that Members felt that further clarity regarding the background and substance of some proposals was needed to enable them to make recommendations and that Members would like the opportunity to revisit these proposals with further detail before making recommendations. Members were in agreement and the Chairperson asked if it was possible to have another meeting in order to make recommendations across the board with confidence.

Following discussions the Chief Officer Legal, HR and Regulatory Services advised that the meeting could be adjourned today, on the basis that the Committee would need to get queries to Directors today to give them, tomorrow to collate further information for Members. Subject to Member and Officer availability, another meeting could be arranged for Monday 25th January 2021 to consider the feedback received from Directors. The report containing the Combined Scrutiny Committees' recommendations would need to be finalised for send out on Tuesday 26th, to meet the statutory requirements for publishing the Agenda for the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee Meeting to be held on 1st February.

The Chairperson thanked the Chief Officer Legal, HR and Regulatory Services and advised that the Members of all 4 Committees would be grateful.

Members agreed to arrangements for an adjourned meeting to be held on the following Monday, 25th January and to the identification of proposals for which they required further clarity.

Chief Executive's Directorate

A Member referred to Page 40, CEX2 and asked if this was a fully funded commitment from the WG and had there been an uplift in the Local Government Settlement to accommodate this.

The Interim Chief Officer Finance, Performance and Change explained that the regulations had changed twice and it was WG's ambition to eradicate homelessness. As a result some quite stringent guidelines were put in place at the beginning of Covid-19, which were updated and strengthened, roundabout July time which meant a duty to provide temporary and permanent accommodation. A variety of solutions had been used and a huge amount of work had been done with partners in Housing Associations, plus hotels, Airbnb, etc. Councils were having real difficulty with the new regulations and it required significant finance. That had been funded until now, for the year, but had been put in as a pressure into the budget because it was not known whether it would be funded in part or in full. It may be that the Interim Chief Officer Finance, Performance and Change would be coming back to Members next year and saying funds had been received for it, in part or in full, but the Local Authority could not go forward in a budget, in that position. There was an indication that there may possibly be an increase in the Housing Support Grant, which might negate some of the required funding.

The Member stated that he would like to see a recommendation coming forward from the Committee that Cabinet are supported, alongside the WLGA in lobbying the WG for a long term package of support, to support these legislative changes.

A Member referred to Page 40, CEX3 and sought clarification in respect of a new policy officer role, but reducing the HR function.

The Chief Executive explained that they were very different things. HR dealt primarily with internal policies and maybe staff policies. What was being talked about here was having a plethora of needs to respond to various bills, and the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act. In addition, the post had a research and development function. He confirmed that an existing officer was already doing part of the role, paid for currently by a health grant in the main. That grant ended at the end of March and it was clear, because of the lean management structure, the requirement to have someone who could help to respond to legislative demands as well as some of the recovery issues that had been talked about.

A Member referred to Page 40, CEX4 in relation to the ICT Digital Strategy Licences and asked if ICT bills were going up because everyone was working from home.

The Head of Partnership Services explained that the Local Authority had found itself previously fortunate having been locked into a low level price with Microsoft. Microsoft had then moved their pricing model to a cloud based service, which had seen exponential growth in terms of the licencing cost, forcing the Authority's hand to move to the cloud, alongside all of the other 22 Local Authorities. It had been raised at an all Wales level, in terms of price increases, but whether staff were on premises working or working at home the cost would still be the same.

A Member referred to Page 43, CEX2 and was concerned, on public health grounds, about the domestic pest control service being withdrawn. He asked that the Chief

Executive consider a model that would protect those on benefits, so that those that could not afford to pay received a service, whilst those that could afford to pay, could make their own arrangements.

The Interim Chief Officer Finance, Performance and Change made reference to the Pest Control Contract report to Cabinet on the 19 January 2021, which provided details about other Councils and how they delivered the service. Three options were put forward, the one in the MTFs, in front of Members today, which would be to remove the service. Some Local Authorities in Wales provided a service for free, some a service which was chargeable and some that provided a service which gave a discount for those on benefits. The current contractor had said it would be extremely expensive to continue to provide the contact in the current way, on the basis that they had a huge number of aborted calls because the service was free. She explained that Cabinet had asked that the options were revisited to see what sort of service could be provided. Talks had taken place with Shared Regulatory Services (SRS), who provided the service in Cardiff and the Vale, although they would not take the service while it was completely free because the level of aborted calls were so high, it was therefore not cost effective for them to do so. In terms of the MTFs, this would be one that would have to be removed as a proposal for a saving because that option was not agreed by Cabinet on Tuesday.

A Member referred to Page 44, CEX5 and asked for further clarity as the narrative talked about failure to meet statutory deadlines, negative feedback from external auditors and increasing the time taken to deal with council tax and housing, which was not acceptable.

The Interim Chief Officer Finance, Performance and Change explained that there was an impact of every savings cut. Finance had looked at every single area, to try and find where it could make savings and whether providing a restructure that would not necessarily result in redundancies, but could move services and functions around, in order to create the saving.

It was a straight fact that savings, or cuts to the number of people with the same volume of demand, would result in longer timescales, unless other ways of doing things, could be found e.g. through digital access, which was being explored. She believed this was a deliverable saving but there would inevitably be some impact.

The Member stated that he could not support delays to Council Tax or Housing Benefit Claims.

A Member referred to Page 43, CEX2 and noted that he was pleased to see the report come forward and asked how the effectiveness of the service, in terms of sewer baiting was evaluated.

The Head of Partnership Services explained that in terms of the sewer baiting, that was paid for by Welsh Water and managed through the SRS, in terms of performance this was based on call outs. There was no explicit performance indicator, it was about responding to actual complaints.

A Member asked how IT equipment that was now in people's houses, was insured.

The Head of Partnership Services explained that all IT equipment was covered by the corporate insurance policy, with laptops recorded on a central database.

The Interim Chief Officer Finance, Performance and Change reminded everyone that there were a lot of rules and regulations about personal use of IT equipment, and that all had a responsibility as well.

A Member also referred to Page 44, CEX5 and stated as a Councillor he was reticent to agree to something that may result in a failure to meet statutory deadlines.

The Interim Chief Officer Finance, Performance and Change stated that every saving had an impact but would look to minimise the effect of it as much as possible. She may be able to amend the narrative, so that it became less threatening. It was not a saving that she wanted to make personally, but all areas needed to make a contribution as one Council.

Council Wide Budget Pressures

A Member referred to Page 40, CW2 in relation to the Fire Service Precept and said surely it was time for the Fire Authority to follow the Police, in terms of how the precept was set.

The Interim Chief Officer Finance, Performance and Change explained that the regulations did not allow that and it was not the same as the Police. She confirmed that she had drafted a letter to the Fire Authority asking about the increase, with a letter received back. There were two Councillors on the Fire Authority, who could make representations, but the Authority remained tied to the existing regulations which was difficult.

A Member referred to Page 25, Table 3, and felt that the Local Authority was a little risk adverse. The best scenario, being looked at in future years was +1% but he hoped it would be better than that, as it was 4.3% this year. The Member then referred to Page 26, and asked if the Local Authority really needed to increase fees and charges for this year. The Member then referred to Page 29 and noted that he had seen this before, in that every Directorate apart from Communities was receiving a net increase in their budget. The Member then referred to Page 31, 4.19.3 in relation to the 'public realm fund' and noted there was an annual £2m public realm fund, but he could not find it in next year's budget.

The Interim Chief Officer Finance, Performance and Change explained that in terms of the estimates and assumptions, ever since she had been at the Council, the estimate has always been -3%. It was only really since the decent settlement last year, repeated this year, that the estimate had been revised although it was not felt this could improve because of all the indications, which didn't necessarily lead anyone to believe there was a lot of money coming into the public sector. The Local Authority had to be realistic, and a cash flat settlement was probably the right place to start. If there were a run of better settlements, there may be the confidence to revise this, but it would be foolish at this stage, on the back of two settlements to revise them any further. In terms of fees and charges there were huge pressures. In truth, some of the fees and charges were not coming in at all and it would put an additional significant pressure on the budget if these weren't increased in line with inflation. In terms of the net increase in budgets, the whole process had gone on since May and there were various savings and various pressures put forward. There were significant pressures in some Directorates and the level of grant income and supplementary, that came into Communities, needed to be taken into account as well. The public realm was a recurring figure, around about £2m being spent, primarily in Communities, even though there were things from other Directorates that could be spent out of public realm. If those were not clear in the budget, then the Interim Chief Officer Finance, Performance and Change said she would come back to the Member, to point to the relevant bit but assured the Member, they were in the budget for next year on a recurring basis.

The Member asked what the figure was in terms of fees and charges.

The Interim Chief Officer Finance, Performance and Change stated that she would have to come back to the Member.

The Leader explained that there was investment, and it was largely in the Communities Directorate in terms of the public realm fund of £2m. The Leader felt that it was a fair question in respect of fees and charges, and it was certainly a principle that all Members had agreed to in the MTFs, that fees and charges would be increased at that rate. In terms of the Revenue Support Grant that was the biggest uncertainty, and how much that was going to be, but if the Authority had further consequential and a better revenue consequential from WG than currently anticipated, then certainly some of the savings would be looked at, particularly the savings that Members had identified.

The Interim Deputy Head of Finance explained that in relation to the Member's comment on the public realm, this was an agreed budget pressure for last financial year, so it was actually in the Communities Directorate base budget already, so would not show as a new budget pressure because it was a recurrent one from a previous year.

The Chairperson then handed over to Councillor JP Blundell, Chair of Subject Overview Scrutiny Committee 3 for the remaining questions from the meeting the day before, in respect of Communities.

A Member referred to Page 43, COM3 and explained that he was concerned about the inability of the Local Authority to take on feasibility studies. The wider point was, certainly on the budget proposal, that the cost of something was known, but not the value of it. Some of the big things going on in the County Borough certainly in terms of regeneration, would not come about, were it not for feasibility studies, and asked what the mind-set was behind this.

The Corporate Director – Communities explained that it had been incredible difficult to come up with budget reduction proposals. This was not to say feasibility studies would not be carried out, as they were a critical part of moving schemes on, but it meant there would not be as much money available as previously, as this was a specified pot that was just for match funding. The resources within the Directorate would have to be used, in other ways, in order to bring schemes forward. There would be a focus to look more closely at the CCR City Deal bids, some of the WG schemes and think more creatively. She did not think this would stop the Local Authority moving forward, it just meant working a little harder. The saving was not for a couple of years and there were still quite a lot of regeneration schemes, capital work, etc. that were going to be undertaken in the next couple of years.

A Member referred to Page 42, COM1 and noted that there had been quite a lot of discussion in relation to this yesterday, but as a Committee felt that the figures needed to be broken down.

The Head of Operations – Community Services explained what was asked for was specific figures relating to Newbridge Fields and the exact cost of the contribution that would make towards Community Asset Transfers (CATs). What the Member had asked for was slightly different e.g., a breakdown of the £300k. He noted that to be clear, the £300k was a target. There wasn't a line that this much would come from CAT or this much would come from the saving from the grass cutting, etc. It was a target and some of it could be influenced but to a degree much was outside of the Directorate's control, as this depended on the variables. If CATs went well, not as much would need to be saved from grass cutting or children's play areas. If there was hardly any CATs across the line, more would need to be saved on grass cutting and children's play areas.

The Member responded that he felt the target should be reduced or spread over the years, as he felt it was not going to happen next year and was unrealistic to keep it there.

The Cabinet Member for Communities explained that he did not want to see the target reduced. The target was not like a quota, and was something that could be missed as long as there was an understanding of why the target was missed. The Head of Operations - Community Services was correct, that the more CAT transfers that went through the system, the less money needed to be saved. He felt it was best left alone but that it needed to be monitored.

The Corporate Director - Communities noted that there was a lot of interest in CATs across the borough. A lot of work had been done in the year progressing with work, acknowledging that they were complicated and a CAT would not be put through until everything was in place and the business plan was robust. If the target of 10 CATs was reduced then savings would need to be looked for, which created greater pressure in other areas.

The Leader explained that the strategy for children's play areas was being reviewed; working with TCC's in particular to improve the children's play offer. Children's play areas could be retained and he hoped to see investment in those and would look to bring additional information back to Members as soon as that information was available.

A Member referred to Page 43, COM3, and explained that he endorsed a previous Member's comment. He noted the Cabinet decision earlier that week that the Local Government and Elections Act paper had been endorsed, within which there was guidance on collaborative working and feasibility studies. He referred to point 7.3 of the MTFS report, the council's approach to meeting its obligations under the Wellbeing of Future generations (Wales) Act for the 5 ways of working, included collaboration and savings generated from collaboration and integrated working. There was a huge section that moved the Local Authority into the direction of collaboration and this seemed to be wholeheartedly taking a section of the ability to do that.

The Corporate Director – Communities explained she was also concerned about this moving forward. There needed to be new ways of working going forward. She felt that the new bill that had come through and the regional working, especially with strategic planning and strategic transport, would compliment what was already being done. Where schemes are looked at the Local Authority worked with adjoining neighbouring authorities in addition to working with the Cardiff Capital Region (CCR) more widely. She felt that the creation of the CCR could open up opportunities, rather than it work the other way. The Local Authority worked in a strategic way, and felt the words 'strategic regeneration fund' meant something different than literally regional working. Strategic was about looking at the long-term future as well as working across the region. A lot of work was being done to mitigate some of the budget pressures and she reassured Members that any feasibility studies carried out, would be of good quality.

The Interim Chief Officer Finance, Performance and Change confirmed that it was always planned that it would cease at this point but there were other feasibility pots that would more than adequately replace it and it was only ever intended to be for this period.

A Member referred to Page 42, COM1 and asked if he could have further information in relation to those 10 interested in CATs including the total cost per site and number of expressions of interest for the next year.

The Corporate Director – Communities stated that the target was to get 10 more CATs through this year. Whilst there was a lot of interest, she explained that some of that data wasn't available now but would definitely be available later on in the year when the work had been completed.

The Head of Operations – Community Services commented in relation to Page 43, COM5, noting that it was a green. The biggest risk associated with leaving Sunnyside House was dilapidation costs, for which a budget had been set aside. He confirmed that everything was on budget and was progressing well.

A Member referred to Page 43, COM6 and asked if the local authority owned the depot.

The Head of Operations - Community Services confirmed that BCBC did own the depot.

A Member referred to Page 43, COM7 and asked for clarification in relation to this.

The Head of Operations - Community Services explained that the Local Authority had been successful with funding which meant that the Authority could pay for vehicles that Kier would effectively use for the remainder of the current contract with the AHP service. As a result, Kier had a saving which would pass back through the revenue in the current contract, displayed as the MTFS saving. The vehicles would be owned by the Local Authority at the end of the current contract, for future contracts or services. This was progressing well and would be delivered.

The Member asked about the suitability of the vehicle.

The Head of Operations – Community Services said he would send the full vehicle spec to the Member, outside of the meeting.

A Member referred to Page 43, COM8 and asked what percentage of the borough now had LED lights.

The Head of Operations - Community Services explained that the vast majority were done, with circa 20k streetlights, and thought it was about 3 or 4k still to go. He could confirm the exact number outside of the meeting.

A Member noted that he hadn't received an answer in relation to Fees and Charges. If fees and charges weren't increased, how much would that be.

The Interim Chief Officer Finance, Performance and Change said that she just wanted to manage expectations on the Fees and Charges because there were thousands and they all had different rules and regulations. She asked that the Member provide specific details outside of the meeting.

A Member said it was very dangerous not to raise fees because it would have two consequences. One because it would create a hole somewhere else, that would have to be filled and secondly when there was an increase in fees, they would increase by larger amounts. By keeping it to the minimum it was still an increase that would help the overall budget. He felt that the recommendation should be for fee increases.

A Member referred to Page 43, COM7 and stated that she would also like the spec of the vehicle and asked for clarification about the vehicles being retained by the Local Authority at the end of the contract. She asked if a tractor had been retained at Waterton depot.

The Head of Operations – Community Services said he was not aware of the tractor. He explained there were some JCBs at the Waterton Depot, which the Highways Department used in various highways activities, including flooding response. Tractors as such, tended to be used by the Parks Department and sat in the Bryncethin Depot. In terms of what happens to the vehicles at the end of the Kier Contract, generally the Local Authority would not own the whole fleet of vehicles at the end of the Kier Contract. The AHP's were separate and would transfer to the Local Authority at the end of the contract.

The Member stated that Members were told that the vehicles would be owned by the Local Authority, and that was one of the benefits. She asked if any thought had been given to purchasing vehicles with the hook mechanism on the back for wheelie bins, for future proofing.

The Head of Operations - Community Services stated that the bulk of the Kier fleet, excluding the AHP collection vehicles which had been paid for by WG, was under Kier's control and were their vehicles. There was an option at the end of the contract to buy the Kier vehicles off them. With regard to buying vehicles for future waste collection terms, if you spec vehicles to be able to pick up wheeled bins, there was an additional cost and they were also quite difficult to load from a manual handling perspective. You would choose what service you wanted and then buy the vehicles that fit. You wouldn't get them just in case going down that route because effectively they wouldn't be very good to use for a sack collection, for example.

The Corporate Director – Communities noted that there was a tremendous amount of decisions to be made in respect of the waste contract going forward. An awful lot of work needed to be done and further discussions could be had at an appropriate time.

A Member referred to Page 43, COM4 and enquired about the cost benefit analysis. He wondered if scaling back on the service would lead to less money in the pot and in the local economy in the long run.

The Corporate Director – Communities explained that it was about baselining expectations, after the pandemic, and looking to rebuild the tourism sector. There was consideration of a regional approach and working on some of the communications as a Local Authority. A cost benefit analysis would be done. She did not feel that the Authority was getting enough benefit from the contract and it was prudent to take a look at everything being done. The intention was for the Authority to cover the work in the way we communicate and marketing is conducted more widely and to use partner organisations from WG and the CCR, to assist us in all of that marketing.

The Member said that he was encouraged by the response, but that this was a large piece of work and was hoping that the proposals would be taken to the most relevant Scrutiny Committee to drill down.

The Corporate Director – Communities explained that this was an incredibly important part of the economy, and a measure, as a factor of success, was the income brought in by tourism, and needed to be kept robust as possible to attract visitors. Tourism was something the Local Authority wanted to get right.

The Senior Democratic Services Officer – Scrutiny advised Members that any additional information requested would be communicated with Directors and Cabinet Members and the information circulated to Members by the end of the week. Arrangements would be made to reconvene the meeting on Monday 25th January and appointments sent. At that meeting the Combined Committees would need to focus their questions upon the proposals for which they had requested additional information and make

CORPORATE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - THURSDAY, 21 JANUARY 2021

recommendations upon the MTFs to meet the timetable for reporting to COSC on 1st February and onwards to Cabinet.

206. **URGENT ITEMS**

None