

SUBJECT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 1 - THURSDAY, 18 JANUARY 2024

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE SUBJECT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 1 HELD HYBRID IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER - CIVIC OFFICES, ANGEL STREET, BRIDGEND, CF31 4WB ON THURSDAY, 18 JANUARY 2024 AT 11:00

Present

Councillor A Williams – Chairperson

H Griffiths
AJ Williams

D M Hughes
E D Winstanley

I M Spiller

JH Tildesley MBE

Present Virtually

RJ Collins

M Jones

T Thomas

Apologies for Absence

M J Evans and J Llewellyn-Hopkins

Officers:

Mark Shephard
Carys Lord
Kelly Watson
Lindsay Harvey

Chief Executive
Chief Officer, Finance, Performance and Change
Chief Officer, Legal, HR and Regulatory Services
Corporate Director Education and Family Support

Nicola Echanis
Deborah Exton
Victoria Adams

Head of Education and Family Support
Deputy Head of Finance
Finance Manager, Budget Management: Communities, Education and Family Support

Lucy Beard
Lindsay Harvey
Rachel Keepins
Mark Shephard

Scrutiny Officer
Corporate Director Education and Family Support
Democratic Services Manager
Chief Executive

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Cabinet Members

Councillor Huw David
Councillor Jane Gebbie
Councillor Hywel Williams
Councillor Jon-Paul Blundell

Leader of Council
Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Social Services and Health
Cabinet Member for Finance, Resources and Legal
Cabinet Member for Education

Invitees / Registered Representatives

Hannah Castle
Jonathan Lewis
Ms Angela Clarke
Ms Samantha Rachel Lambert-Worgan

Chair of Schools Budget Forum
Vice Chair of Schools Budget Forum
Church of Wales Registered Representative
Special School Parent Governor Representative

Declarations of Interest

Councillor Amanda Williams – Personal – Chair of Governors at Coety Primary School

37. Approval of Minutes

Decision Made	<u>Resolved:</u> That the minutes of a meeting of Subject Overview and Scrutiny Committee 1 dated 4 December 2023, be approved as a true and accurate record.
Date Decision Made	18 January 2024

38. Medium Term Financial Strategy 2024-25 to 2027-28

Decision Made	<u>Resolved:</u> Following consideration of the report and detailed discussion with Cabinet Members and Senior Officers the Committee made the following comments and recommendations: 1. SCH 1 In relation to the proposed reduction related to Schools Delegated Budgets of 5% in 2024-2025, Members expressed strong concerns over the size of the saving for the forthcoming
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year and the potential impact this would have on school budgets, with reports stating that this was unsustainable and would result in over 80% of schools within the County Borough going into deficit.

Evidence provided by representatives of the School Budget Forum highlighted the recent significant increase of vulnerable learners that has been seen by all schools since the pandemic, more than has ever been seen before. It was reported that the impact of the proposed 5% reduction to school budgets, together with the further proposed reductions in support services, could severely affect vulnerable learners.

- a** In order to lessen the impact as much as possible and enable schools more time to plan and prepare, the Committee recommend that the proposed saving of 5% be reduced and spread out across years 2, 3 and 4, starting with only a 2% reduction for 2024-25, followed by 2% for each year 2-4, thereby still making the overall 8% required.
- b** To fill this budget gap, the Committee recommend that Cabinet consider utilising any potential funding the Authority might receive from Central Government relating to teacher pensions as well as revisit the proposed budget pressures of £11,856m and consider which ones could be postponed for 2024-2025.

2. EFS 12, 13 and 14 Support Services and Pupils with Additional Learning Needs

The Committee highlighted the negative impact the proposed reductions of EFS, 12,13 and 14 would have on pupils with Additional Learning Needs (ALN) as identified by Headteacher representatives at the meeting. Members were particularly concerned with the fact that these reductions could result in the Authority not meeting its statutory duties to these children and young people in meeting the timescales for assessments. The Committee strongly supported the view of how important these assessment for pupils with ALN were, many of which have complex needs, thus requiring a swift assessment so that they are able to access the support services they require.

As a result of these concerns and the Authority's legal obligation to these pupils, the Committee recommend that EFS 13 and 14 be removed from the budget reduction proposals and that these associated budgets be ringfenced against future reduction. Members proposed that this saving of £67,000 could potentially be found from within the proposed £500,000

growth proposed under EFS4, and asked for clarification for the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee, of what this £500,000 incorporated, for consideration by Members at the final budget meeting on the 30th of January.

3.Statutory Services and Duties

Building upon the above recommendation, the committee expressed strong concern over all proposed reductions which highlight a potential impact in meeting the Authority's statutory duties. Members highlighted the significant ramifications this could have for the Local Authority and recommend that Cabinet guard against this as a priority, revisiting those proposals which put the delivery of statutory duties at risk.

4.Financial Scheme for Schools

Whilst appreciating that proposed changes to the school funding formula (other than that bound by legislation) can be raised and discussed by the School Budget Forum, Members highlighted the fact that as circumstances have changed so much since the Covid pandemic, and the funding pressures now being faced by schools, there was a need for the Local Authority to instigate a review of the financial scheme for schools. The Committee also expressed concern over reports that primary school governing bodies may have not been involved or consulted upon previous reviews and changes to the funding formula. The Committee therefore recommend that a full review of the financial scheme and funding formula for schools be undertaken, with full involvement of both primary and secondary governing bodies supported by training provision on this subject so that governors, who are, after all, volunteers, are suitably informed to participate fully in the review.

Comments

- The Committee supported the view that there was drastic transformational change needed across the Local Authority in order to meet future service provision within difficult budgets. However, it was highlighted that care needed to be taken where budget reductions have additional ramifications on other services, such as schools, to not unduly burden those services, on top of their own reductions.

Additional Information

In order for Members to have a full picture of the staffing reductions for the Local Authority going forward and their ramifications, they requested that they receive sight of all basic staffing restructures, noting that care was needed so as to not identify individual staff members. The committee asked if this information could illustrate the situation before and after any proposed restructure so as to view the full implication.

SOSC 1 Forward Work Programme

Home to School Transport

The Committee commented positively on the proposal to commence a review of the Authority's Home to School Transport provision rather than wait until Welsh Government complete their own review, given the difficult budget situation the Authority now faces. The Committee asked that when reported to scrutiny at a future meeting, information is provided on:

How many children receive HTST due to the lack of safe routes to school;

The impact any reduction might have on Welsh Medium education provision, including how to prevent these pupils being adversely affected.

Letter to Welsh Government

Whilst acknowledging the proposed 3% budget increase from Welsh government as part of its draft settlement, the Committee expressed serious concerns regarding the mounting pressures on local services including schools and social services, and the fact that the settlement was simply not enough to cover such pressures. The Committee appreciate that this was the same for all Local Authorities, however, given reports received that the Minister wished to protect school budgets, Members stated that more needed to be done by Welsh Government to support and fund Local Authorities appropriately. The Committee therefore agreed to write to Welsh Government to highlight these issues and to support Cabinet in putting extra pressure on Ministers to address the funding situation for Local Authorities.

In addition to this, the Committee asked that this letter to Welsh Government also highlight the need for Local Authorities to receive earlier clarification on any external or central budget allocation. This is as a consequence of the ongoing uncertainty currently being experienced in

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	relation to teacher pensions and whether these will be centrally funded. Without such information, it is extremely difficult for Local Authorities to effectively plan and produce, and more importantly consult on, a correct and informed balanced budget.
Date Decision Made	18 January 2024

39. Urgent Items

Decision Made	None.
Date Decision Made	18 January 2024

To observe further debate that took place on the above items, please click this [link](#) for Part One and this [link](#) for Part Two.

The meeting closed at 15:00.