

Report of the Budget Research and Evaluation Panel 2017

- 1.1 The Budget Research and Evaluation Panel (BREP) has considered the draft budget proposals for the year 2018-19.
- 1.2 The work of the BREP helps to ensure financial transparency and accountability with regard to the draft budget proposals and the draft Corporate Priorities. This ensures that elected Members have the opportunity to help to develop and shape Council policies on the delivery of services, which is particularly important at a time of increasing demand for services, public sector reform and the challenging financial outlook.
- 1.3 The BREP acknowledge the financial challenges facing the authority and the need to make substantial savings over the term of the MTFs and therefore stress the importance of BREP and Scrutiny taking an active role in monitoring the savings in the context of a 'One Council' approach.
- 1.4 The BREP are concerned that year on year the opportunities to identify additional savings to offset shortfalls in planned savings become fewer and less sustainable. Therefore it is increasingly vital that budget savings are delivered as planned.
- 1.5 Whilst the BREP understand and agree that statutory services are required, Members highlighted that the Authority and each Directorate should still consider how to undertake those statutory services more efficiently.
- 1.6 The Panel also commented on the way Directorates appeared isolated, working in silos and also of the need for evidence of communication between Directorates as well as throughout them in order to meet the needs of future demand on services and budget.

Recommendation 1

The Panel recommend that Corporate Leadership is enhanced to bring Directorates together and ensure collaboration within and across all Directorates. Members further proposed that future quarterly reviews through Corporate Performance Assessments look to incorporate Scrutiny representation.

2 Draft Budget Proposals

Home to School Transport 2017/18

- 2.1 The Panel briefly discussed the findings and responses from last year's BREP process with particular concern over the Learner Transport savings and the fact that there are far too many buses that continue to be empty part way through the year. The Corporate Director – Education and Family Support updated the Committee explaining that in Spring and Summer terms 2017-2018 the school transport team will run a pilot to support the enforcement of bus passes on home to school transport contracts. As part of this pilot, the Authority would also investigate opportunities to track the use of our school bus services by individual pupils.

Recommendation 2

The Panel recommend the need for the Authority to adopt a Corporate approach in relation to Home to School Transport maximising the use of vehicles such as those used for day centres.

Recommendation for Scrutiny

Whilst understanding the risks, Members welcomed the school transport pilot and suggested that the pilot and its outcomes are considered by Scrutiny as part of their Forward Work Programme.

Communities

Collaboration with Town and Community Councils (TCCs)

- 2.2 In its initial discussions the Panel determined to revisit the item on TCCs to consider how the Local Authority (LA) is collaborating and communicating with TCCs in a bid to maintain community services that are at risk of future budget cuts. This included the Panel receiving an update on last year's BREP recommendations on this item to consider the ongoing work. The Panel expressed concern that Members themselves were reporting issues in that they are in some instances offering to take on assets and services from the LA, but the LA don't seem to be receptive.
- 2.3 Further concerns were expressed by the Panel regarding the fact that TCCs do not have the staff or resources to necessarily take on various services that the LA currently provides. Examples of need were given that linked to HR functions which TCC do not have access to, including Health and Safety and training.
- 2.4 Nevertheless, the Panel commented on the fact that there is a pool of approximately £2m available within the TCC community which could potentially be utilised for addressing local issues that currently fall within the Communities Directorate. Caution should simply be taken to ensure that enough support is provided and there is not too much over reliance on TCCs.

Recommendation 3

The Panel recommend that there needs to be a cultural shift in the way the LA works with TCC with clear strategic leadership backed by Cabinet Support. As part of achieving the Corporate Priority 'Supporting a Successful Economy', there needs to be emphasis on maintaining neighbourhood services to help ensure attractiveness for future investment.

Recommendation 4

The Panel recommend that to ensure effective collaborative working between the LA and TCCs there needs to be a dedicated officer to drive it from the LA, similar to the role that is in place for CATs. The Panel propose also introducing Service Level Agreements between both parties to ensure the required support is in place.

Recommendation 5

The Panel recommend that the TCCs agenda an item for their retrospective town or community council to pursue whether or not there is appetite for creating a role to act as a strategic co-ordinator between LA and TCC. Members highlighted the need to include what the role would cover and what positive outcomes this post would create.

Recommendation 6

It is recommend that Cabinet support the proposal to provide match funding for a strategic co-ordinator role between TCCs and the LA, to take forward joint working following clarification of sufficient uptake by TCCs.

- 2.5 The Panel discussed the possibility of following the similar approach that is used by schools where they can buy in services from the LA. Members proposed that comparable processes could be introduced for services required by local communities through TCCs where they could buy these in from the LA.

Recommendation 7

The Panel recommend that a scoping exercise be undertaken to explore the possibility of TCCs buying in various services from the LA. This exercise needs to take into account the cost of TCCs buying directly from the LA compared with TCCs employing their own staff which would incorporate on costs including training and health and safety.

Recommendation to TCC Forum and Charter Working Group

Members highlighted the need to encourage TCCs to work more collaboratively with other TCCs and with the LA to enhance their viability to maintain services that otherwise may not continue to be funded by the LA. The Panel also suggested that procuring services jointly could ensure increased value for money for their residents. Members therefore recommended that these comments be presented to the TCC Forum and the Charter Working Group to assist with their ongoing review of the Charter.

- 2.6 In general discussions over the subject of Community Asset Transfers the Panel commented that the current lists of available assets being provided to TCCs were often out of date or inaccurate. The Panel also commented that a lack of interest by some TCCs and community groups in taking over assets such as parks or playing fields could be impacted by the absence of a definitive deadline.

Recommendation 8

The Panel recommend that TCCs be provided with an accurate, up to date detailed list of available assets before their precepts are set in November/December and ensure the list is maintained regularly to illustrate when assets are no longer available.

Recommendation 9

Members recommend that a definitive deadline be provided in relation to the Community Asset Transfer process outlining when the Council would no longer support the Asset or service.

Working with Partner Organisations

- 2.7 During the Panel's meetings there was much discussion associated with a range of topics, on collaborative working and working with partner organisations. One of the main themes coming out of this work was that joint working with the Police Authority was not as advanced as that for other organisations such as Health. Some examples of this was the joint working that has been established in Community Hubs, which as yet, has no link with the Police.
- 2.8 Further concerns were expressed over the roles of both the LA and the Police and the fact that the public perception of this was not always positive as it was not always clear. Evidence provided, for example suggested that there is significant variation in the roles of PCSOs, both within the South Wales region and also with their counterparts in England and the rest of Wales.
- 2.9 Examples of where Members thought that improved collaborative working could assist was in relation to parking fines, fly tipping and issues with unadopted lanes or roads, all of which vary between LAs in terms of what is a LA and Police responsibility.
- 2.10 The Panel questioned whether improved collaborative working with the Police, and PCSOs possibly being given more power, (as is the case in other LAs), could assist in savings or cost avoidance in particular areas.

Recommendation 10

The Panel recommend a review be undertaken to consider how other LAs within Wales work with the police in relation to community policing. Members propose that the LA look to adopt similar processes as the likes of Cardiff and Neath Port Talbot in relation to the roles and responsibilities between the Authority and the Police and also how they respond to instances such as lane clearance in un-adopted areas.

Recommendation to Scrutiny

The Panel highlighted the need to work more closely with the Police and therefore proposed that a Research and Evaluation Panel be established to look at Policing of the borough on a local level. Members proposed the following points and areas to go to the Research and Evaluation Panel for consideration as part of their ongoing investigative work:

- a) Clarify the roles of the Police, PCSO's and LAs to to inform all Members, members of the public, Inspectors and PCSOs;
- b) How often does the Chief Executive and Leader meet with key people in the Police to discuss and align priorities;

- c) **How often do both the Corporate Director – Operational and Partnership Services and the Corporate Director - Communities meet with their counterparts in the Police to discuss community policing and safety within the County Borough and align priorities.**
- d) **The need for a joint plan between Police and the LA;**
- e) **How the Police assist the LA in relation to safeguarding vulnerable adults and children.**

Valleys Task Force

- 2.11 The Panel received a brief update on what the LA are expecting to achieve from investment into the Valleys Task Force so that there is clear direction and clear outcomes.
Officers reported that this was a Welsh Government initiative which had gone out to consultation with Maesteg. A final strategy document and Ministerial announcement are expected shortly, however until the final strategy and funding package is approved by Welsh Government, it is not possible to state what projects and programmes Bridgend could expect to take forward.
- 2.12 Members highlighted the need to ensure that the funds gained by the Valleys Task Force are over and above what could already be achieved without.

Social Services and Wellbeing Directorate

- 2.13 Concerns were expressed by the Panel over the fact that the Social Services Directorate, with a budget of £64m, were only proposing a £350,000 budget saving for 2018-19. Through discussions with the Head of Finance it was explained that although the Social Services Directorate had small budget savings being brought forward, they would still have to make up the overspend from 2017-18 which was currently projected to be around £1.9m.
- 2.14 Through further exploration of this with the Corporate Director – Social Services and Wellbeing provided detail of various projects and pieces of work that were being undertaken that are aiming to produce savings in the next 12-18 months. These included Residential Remodelling within both Children’s and Adults Services, work into Early Help relating to the Institute of Public Care ‘Pathways’ review, the ‘Baby in Mind’ and ‘Reflect’ projects, the launch of the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) and work in relation to the Foster Care Service.
- 2.15 The Panel raised concern that Bridgend had always experienced significantly high numbers of Looked After Children (LAC) when compared to other Local Authorities in Wales, even those Local Authorities with similar social deprivation. Members acknowledged the work that was being undertaken for those receiving in depth services however they expressed concern over the early preventative work in relation to both adults and children, with particular concern in children services. The Panel were advised that over the last six months there had been a spike in the numbers of LAC in other LAs across Wales, however, Bridgend figures had remained steady. The Corporate Director – Social Services also explained that the Authority had a number of cases where there were repeated pregnancies where each child had been

taken into care. Unfortunately early help had been slow to respond to this need but this was now being looked at under such projects as 'Baby in Mind' and 'Reflect'.

- 2.16 Many of these cases also involved teenage pregnancies which had always been relatively high in Bridgend. It was reported that the Authority had recruited 2 foster families for young mums and their babies which had been trialled in other LAs.

Recommendation 11

The Panel recommend that the projected overspend for Social Services for 2017-18 that will roll over for 2018-19 should be made clearer in the final budget report to Council and Cabinet so that it is fully understood that that their current projected budget savings for 2018-19 actually equate to around £2.2m, not the £350,000 it appears from the individual budget proposals.

- 2.17 The Panel also discussed the impact of the £70 per week cap for care for Adults. This had caused more people to ask for more respite which was having to be counteracted by considering how suitable the eligibility criteria were.
- 2.18 In discussion relating to a financial plan for Social Services, the Panel were advised that this was still being drafted and was still short of the target. The Panel acknowledged that this was corporate issue and needed the appropriate corporate support.

Recommendations for Scrutiny

The Panel recommend that Scrutiny receive data relating to the Early Help and Safeguarding Board's joint dataset referred to by the Corporate Director – Social Services, which will evidence how the work being undertaken in relation to Early Help has impacted directly on social services.

The Panel recommend that Scrutiny receive the Social Services Q1 Financial Plan as soon as possible detailing the proposals for how the Directorate are going to make the savings over the forthcoming year. The Panel requested that the Chief Executive also attend this meeting to present a corporate perspective.

Further Information for Scrutiny

- 2.19 Detail of where the Authority stands in terms of numbers of teenage pregnancies compared with the rest of Wales and what is being done to educate and support young people;
- 2.20 Detail of the FTE for the 51 employees that have left the authority in the last 12-18 months from the Social Services Directorate and where these have come from, i.e. what staffing level.

Education

- 2.21 The Panel invited the Corporate Director – Education and Family Support to a Panel meeting to discuss the impact of the 1% budget proposal that was included in the budget savings for 2017-18. The Corporate Director – Education and Family Support reported that there had been no significant redundancies as a result of the budget saving.
- 2.22 As part of these discussions the Panel also heard evidence of the impact of increasing costs for pupils with Additional Learning Needs, with three stages involved ranging from school involvement to Occupational Health providing support to pupils. The Panel highlighted concerns that these associated costs would likely increase again due to the impact of the ALN Bill and the onus on schools to undertake Individual Development Plans (IDPs).
- 2.23 The Panel also questioned what arrangements schools were putting place where they had deficit budgets. Members were advised that each school experiencing a deficit budget had to put a plan in place that indicated how they were going to get out of the red within a 3 year period. These plans were monitored by the Directorate on a monthly basis. The Panel were also informed that it was not unusual for new schools to experience deficits in their first few years due to surplus places that will eventually be full after a period of time.

Recommendation 12

The Panel recommend introducing stronger support and Governor training that is streamlines to focus on priorities to assist Governors with effectively managing and scrutinising their schools budget.

- 2.24 Points were also raised in relation to legal costs that schools now had to pay to hire independent legal support as and when required. The Corporate Director – Education and Family Support however advised the Panel that plans were in place to review the legal support for schools to look at bringing the service in house. The idea was to employ two lawyers, specialising in employment and education which would be funded from the schools budget at a fraction of the cost of what they currently pay for outsourced support.
- 2.25 In relation to Local Development Plans, the Panel raised concerns that the LA were not working closely enough and with Developers in terms of educational need for new housing developments and Developers were not looking in enough detail at the local catchment areas and school places. The Panel also discussed the LDP formula which calculates how much a developer will pay towards a school.

Recommendation 13

Members raised concerns that the figures provided by the Education Directorate for Section 106 agreements were often identified at the lowest levels. The LDP focussed on primary school provision with less on secondary, Special and Welsh schools. The Panel therefore recommend that Education, Social Services and Health work more closely with the Planning department to develop the Local Development

Plan to ensure involvement in the whole process and to provide more influence on its content. This is to include consideration of all ages and all types of education, for example, access to Welsh and Special schools.

- 2.26 On the subject of income generation the Panel discussed the need for schools to increase the focus on raising income through avenues such as the renting out of their facilities out of school hours. Whilst some schools within the County Borough were very successful in doing this, others were not so effective.

Recommendation 14

The Panel recommend that schools are encouraged to look at all aspects for savings and income generation such as halls and sports facilities etc, with detail of this included in their school plans. This will not only assist local communities but will also help minimise the impact of potential future budget savings possibly being introduced for schools in forthcoming years.

Recommendation 15

With reference to income generation from schools facilities, Members recommend that a standardised fee programme is introduced and provided to head teachers as a guideline to proposed fees. This needs to take into account the charges of other local facilities within the County Borough to ensure they are competitive.

Recommendation to Schools

It is recommended that schools take account of the ongoing maintenance costs of their facilities when considering income generation and that the two are linked in school maintenance plans. This will ensure schools are taking into account long term planning for future replacement of such things as pitch surfaces.

- 2.27 The Panel discussed aspects of the LAs school music provision, querying the varying provision and associated costs.

Recommendation 16

Following discussion over the Schools Music Service and with reference to possible future budget pressures within schools, the Panel recommend that as the Music Service is a select service, that its allocated funding be removed in favour of retaining key school staff. The Panel further proposed that the funding be subsidised by the child's parents, by way of means testing.

The Panel further recommend that when the above proposal is considered the following points are taken into account:

- **What level of music service provision is mandatory;**
- **What service provision is each school providing;**
- **How many pupils are currently paying for music provision**

- **Equality Impact Assessment.**

Growth Proposals

2.28 The Panel requested clarification of the growth proposal for the Festival of Learning, to which they were advised that this would be a week-long event, with the aim to:

- promote inclusive learning from basic to further education;
- revitalise learning in families and communities;
- facilitate learning for and in the workplace;
- extend the use of modern learning technologies; and
- enhance quality and excellence in learning.

The event would feature:

- a programme of workshops held in every school in Bridgend;
- taster events involving Bridgend College and local employers;
- a symposium involving local education providers, school governors, regional and national partners, local employers and elected members;
- a one-day event celebrating learners' work; and
- an online brochure capturing the outcomes (informed by case studies prepared by participant schools) of the week.

2.29 Members were also advised that the £65,000 one-off spend was the worst case scenario and most of the cost was associated with providing teaching cover and transport so that teachers could actually attend.

The Panel initially questioned whether this should be funded by the Consortium and whether this investment contradicted the proposed cut to funding for the Consortium. Members also expressed concerns that the event was a lot of money that could be spent on other aspects such as supporting disadvantaged children in their attainment.

Recommendation 17

The Panel recommend that in order for the Festival of Learning event to be funded, it must evidence clear measureable outcomes towards raising education standards. The Panel further recommend that Scrutiny receive detail of this for information as well as specifics of what the teachers will provide at the event to offer more of an understanding of the structure and content of the event.

Recommendation 18

The Panel recommend that the Directorate pursue sponsorship from local businesses and Bridgend College to fund the Festival of Learning. The Panel recommend that schools select a broad range of pupil representation to partake in the event to ensure there is a variety of views being incorporated.

Operational and Partnership Services (OPS)

2.30 When considering the OPS Directorate, the Panel commented on the fact that it was evident that this Directorate was consistently planning long term;

underspends in the budget now, were part of preparations for future budget cuts likely for the Directorate. The Panel discussed the need for more Transformational Leadership across the Authority in order to create a culture change to meet future budget pressures.

Recommendation 19

The Panel applaud the leadership approach and innovation being introduced within the OPS Directorate but recognise and recommend the need to be vigilant to that fact that further cuts in this area can have a significant impact on frontline services across the LA.

Recommendation 20

The Panel recognise that it is sometimes more straight forward to introduce change in some Directorates than others, however recommend that there needs to be more Transformational Leadership and culture change across the LA. Thus ensuring that long term, realistic planning and change is clearly conveyed and understood by staff at all levels and that future needs, both budgetary and service, can be met.

Further General Comments and Recommendations

Recommendation to Corporate Overview and Scrutiny

Collaboration

- 2.31 The Panel recommend that the subject of Collaboration Working be put forward to the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee for inclusion in their forward work programme to:
1. Establish an understanding of the collaboration work that is being undertaken within the LA, including projects such as City Deal and Valleys Task Force;
 2. Receive an update on the accountability arrangements that is in place of collaboration work/joint services;
 3. Consider how collaboration work has assisted in achieving value for money and contributed to the Authorities overall budget savings;
 4. Investigate and monitor the extent to which other LAs are working in collaboration with TCCs;
 5. To receive the outcome of the Review currently being undertaken by Welsh Government in relation to TCCs and its impact on BCBC;
 6. Explore how the Authority is collaborating with the Police and to what extent they have been approached to share the monetary burden especially in enforcement;
 7. Explore why the Authority has not progressed joint services for HR other than the current pension system, as well as Finance and Democratic Services.
 8. Internal collaboration – how are Corporate Directors learning from one another; what can be learnt, what positive aspects can be shared and how can this be transferred appropriately across other Directorates?

Recommendations to Democratic Services Committee

Member Referrals

2.32 Following a discussion in relation to Member referrals, the Panel requested that the following queries and recommendations be referred to the Democratic Services Committee for consideration:

- The Panel specified that Member responses to referrals differ between Directorates– some respond much quicker than others and also provide a written response outlining a timeframe for resolution. What Directorates are compliant with timelines?
- Are Member referrals monitored for dissatisfaction?
- How do other LAs deal with Member Referrals?

With this in mind, the Panel recommend that all referrals are allocated a resolution timeline and detailing what action will be taken and that this be fed back to Members on completion.

It is further recommended that an annual report be provided to Members detailing an analysis of the themes originating from Member Referrals to improve their knowledge and daily understanding of the needs and priorities of the public including future budget setting needs.

3 Presentation of Budget to the Public and Budget Consultation Process

3.1 The Panel discussed the presentation of the Budget report and commented on the fact that it was not transparent and did not provide enough detail of the impact of the budget proposals. Members expressed the view that the report does not show how the current budget is being spent or how exactly savings are going to be made

Recommendation 21

The Panel recommend that a review be undertaken of how the budget is presented to ensure that Members and the public are able to fully understand the implications of the proposals being put forward. The Panel further propose that this review include the input of Members and consider how the budget is presented in other LAs.

4 Future role of the Budget Research and Evaluation Panel

4.1 The BREP consider that the work of the Panel is a vital and important mechanism for budget setting and monitoring to ensure an objective, democratic approach from the start of the budget setting process.

4.2 The Panel however commented that this process for Scrutiny needs to start a lot earlier with meetings leading up to the budget setting process in order to discuss with Cabinet early proposals and assist with their development.

- 4.3 The Panel proposed the possibility of a more detailed approach similar to that of other LAs where the budget is considered line by line.
- 4.4 The Panel also requested that Corporate Directors are invited to either the introductory or concluding meeting and that where Corporate Directors are asked for specific information on individual topics throughout the BREP process a presentation be provided detailing the current and future plan.
- 4.5 The Panel concluded that subsequent to the presentation of Scrutiny's recommendations to Cabinet and an initial response being received, this be followed up by a report in early April to provide the Corporate Overview Scrutiny Committee with an update on the budget recommendations. They further requested that the Chief Executive and Leader be invited to attend this meeting.