

Comments from Individual Overview and Scrutiny Committees 2017-18

1 Subject Overview and Scrutiny Committee 1

Education and Family Support Directorate

- 1.1 The Committee recommend that in order for Members to support the Festival of Learning proposed budget growth there needs to be clear objectives and outcomes in order to see what is going to be achieved from this one-off investment.
- 1.2 The Committee recommend that the Authority lobby Welsh Government to consider longer term budget planning to enable Local Authorities to better plan for the future and have security of funding for projects and priorities.
- 1.3 The Committee recommend that the Authority ensure that strong links are made between any future investment for schools and the current and future Local Development Plan with closer working relationships with all those involved. This is in line with the requirements of the Wellbeing and Future Generations (Wales) Act in terms of how decisions taken now should be taking account of the longer term impact on future generations.
- 1.4 The Committee recommend that early and serious consideration be given to the proposals for future Education cuts of a 1% efficiency saving from 2019-20 onwards including evidence of potential impact and how schools and the Local Authority can plan to minimise this impact on schools, staff and most importantly on pupil performance.

2 Subject Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2

Social Services and Wellbeing Directorate

- 2.1 Due to the issues in achieving income generation due to the Welsh Government cap of £70 per week for non-residential care, the Committee recommend that Cabinet lobby Welsh Government to consider the possibility of introducing a means tested cap that takes into account people who are able to pay supplementary monies."

3 Subject Overview and Scrutiny Committee 3

Communities

- 3.1 In relation to the budget reductions proposals put forward for 18-19 for the Communities Directorate, the Committee fundamentally do not agree with them in their entirety and recommend that the Social Services and Education Directorates who have the two highest budgets in the Authority be looked at instead to make up these savings.
- 3.2 The Committee expressed concerns over the proposals for the removal of subsidised bus services (COM 27), particularly given the fact that bus companies themselves are cutting their own routes and that the Authority's

own proposals for service cuts have not yet gone out for public consultation. The Committee therefore recommend:

- a) Prior to any decision being made on the routes being cut, Cabinet also receive information on what routes bus companies themselves are cutting in order to understand the overall impact of the combined route reductions;
- b) That no decision is made regarding the proposed budget cuts to the service until public consultation has been completed;
- c) The Committee also requested that Scrutiny get the opportunity to receive an item on the proposals and the outcome of Consultation for the removal of subsidised bus services as a pre-decision item before going to Cabinet.

- 3.3 In relation to COM1, the Committee recognise the work being undertaken to look at various options for public conveniences such as the comfort scheme and the possibility of Town and Community Councils taking these on. However given the focus of this Authority to improve our towns and encourage the public back into them, together with the view that public toilets are an essential necessity, the Committee recommend that no cuts are made to public conveniences within the Local Authority.
- 3.4 The Committee made comment on the management savings being put forward by the Communities Directorate and the fact that these are not reflected in other Directorates. In light of sharing the burden of the budget cuts, the Committee recommend that other Directorates also look towards management efficiency savings.
- 3.5 The Committee recommend that instead of disposing of the councils land and selling it off, the Authority look at the potential for revenue through development. One suggestion was the need for increased properties for small businesses in the County Borough. Members also recommend considering what land development and income generation other Local Authorities have achieved to determine what areas have been successful.
- 3.6 The Committee recommend that the £40,000 reduction proposed for third sector support for with Community Asset Transfer (CAT) be removed given the impact this will have on achieving the savings required from CATs.
- 3.7 The Committee did not support the discretionary growth items of £500,000 for schools to replace the Welsh Government reduction in the Education Improvement Grant and the £65,000 proposed for the week long 'Festival of Learning'. At a time of austerity and serious budget cuts the Committee views that these budget growths should not be supported and the money could be better spent elsewhere in the Authority. Should the 'Festival of Learning' continue to take place, the Committee recommend that it be held in school holiday time so as to reduce the costs for providing teacher cover.

- 3.8 The Committee recommend that the Authority explore further whether there are greater opportunities for collaborative working for Community Services in order to achieve savings and at the same time improve these services.
- 3.9 The Committee recommend that the Authority consider the services provided by the Association for Public Service Excellence (APSE) to possibly assist in longer term planning and sustainability of Community Services.
- 3.10 The Committee expressed concern that the Authority continues to look to the Communities Directorate for further budget savings that are disproportional to those of other Directorates. The example given was that for 2018-19 the Communities Directorate is being asked for a 6% cut of its own budget whilst other Directorates, which hold around 2/3 of the Councils total budget are only being asked to make between 0.5 and 0.6% savings out of their own budget. Members understand this is due to the fact that the services within the Communities Directorate are not deemed as Council priorities, however the Committee also questioned as to whether the Authority was taking into account what the priorities were for the public. With this in mind the Committee recommend that the Authority reconsider its corporate priorities to take account of the 'public element' and realign Community Services as a Corporate priority.
- 3.11 Whilst not wishing to make cuts to Education and Schools and likewise Social Services, the Committee believe that with such large budgets there have to be efficiency savings within these Directorates that could assist with sharing the burden of the Authority's budget cuts. It is therefore recommended that where the Committee have concerns around cuts within the Communities budget, such as those mentioned above such as public conveniences and CATs, the Authority instead look to these other Directorates to make up these savings proposed.