

**CORPORATE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - WEDNESDAY, 21 FEBRUARY 2018**

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE CORPORATE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE  
HELD IN COMMITTEE ROOMS 2/3 - CIVIC OFFICES ANGEL STREET BRIDGEND CF31  
4WB ON WEDNESDAY, 21 FEBRUARY 2018 AT 09:30**

Present

Councillor CA Green – Chairperson

JPD Blundell  
B Sedgebeer

J Gebbie  
RMI Shaw

T Giffard  
JC Spanswick

M Jones  
T Thomas

Apologies for Absence

N Clarke, RL Penhale-Thomas and CA Webster

Officers:

Sarah Daniel  
Mark Galvin

Democratic Services Officer - Scrutiny  
Senior Democratic Services Officer - Committees

Invitees:

Susan Cooper

Corporate Director - Social Services &  
Wellbeing

Councillor Huw David  
Lindsay Harvey

Leader  
Corporate Director Education and Family  
Support

Andrew Jolley

Corporate Director Operational &  
Partnership Services

Darren Mepham  
Mark Shephard  
Councillor Charles Smith

Chief Executive  
Corporate Director - Communities  
Cabinet Member for Education and  
Regeneration

Councillor Philip White

Cabinet Member for Social Services and  
Early Help

Councillor Hywel Williams  
Councillor Richard Young

Deputy Leader  
Cabinet Member Communities

41. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

42. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE 2017-18

The Scrutiny Officer presented a report, in order to outline the items due to be considered at the Committee's meeting dated 29 March 2018, and seek confirmation of the information required for the subsequent scheduled meeting to be held on 30 April 2018. The report also itemised a list of potential Forward Work Programme (FWP) items for formal prioritisation and allocation to each of the Subject Overview and Scrutiny Committees.

Members discussed the FWP, and accepted the items allocated for future Committees as detailed in the report.

Members also requested an un-redacted copy of the Waste Contract from the Corporate Director Operational and Partnership Services, and requested that a confidential

meeting of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee be convened following the Annual meeting of Council, to discuss the contract management issues within the Contract. Members also prioritised the Waste Services performance issues, to be scheduled at the June meeting of SOSC 3.

43. BUDGET MONITORING - QUARTER 3 2017-18

The Chairperson welcomed the Invitees to the meeting.

On behalf of Committee she expressed her disappointment over the fact that a specialist Finance Officer was not in attendance at the meeting, particularly as the item was a Budget Monitoring report

The Chief Executive advised that he would be able to answer queries Members had on the report, together with assistance from the Deputy Leader. He explained that the Interim Head of Finance had pre-booked annual leave for a planned holiday prior to her being employed by the Authority on a temporary basis. This was compounded by the fact that a number of other Finance Officers were on annual leave for half term. The Chief Executive apologised for this to Members.

A Member referred to paragraph 3.1 of the report and noted the fact that the capital programme for the year had reduced from a figure of £63.854m to £49.893m, so as to take into account new approvals and slippage of schemes into 2018-19. He asked for the reasons behind this, and queried why this was not an area of growth, rather than a slippage of capital monies.

The Chief Executive advised that any changes with regard to schemes included in the Capital Programme were reported to Council, and an explanation for such changes were given in the report (submitted to Council) at this time. Any such changes to allow for any new approvals and/or slippage of schemes were not necessarily picked up in the quarterly monitoring reports considered in respect of the Budget. Further information and explanation could be found in Section 4 of the report.

The Member whilst accepting the explanation, considered a slippage of around £14m to be a significant amount of money, and he felt that more explanation regarding changes to the Capital Programme should be included in the Quarter 4 Budget Monitoring report to Committee, as well as further examination of contingency funds being examined by Members at year end.

A Member asked what impact the Budget was having on staff reductions and vacancies.

The Chief Executive advised that the Authority used to have a freeze on the recruitment of posts, but due to more demand being put on himself and Directors to achieve savings required of them, a minimal number or no posts at all had been frozen in the Authority for some time. This was negated by some work slipping in terms of its priority in being completed, or staff having to become increasingly skilled to adapt to other areas of work aside of their core duties.

Though it appeared that there was an underspend across the Authority in the area of vacancy management, this was due to the fact that Directorates were continually having to look at achieving increased savings through carrying out Directorate re-structures. The Chief Executive added that whilst the re-structuring of Directorates was the responsibility of the appropriate Director, he as Chief Executive, also looked at any restructuring proposals from a corporate perspective.

A Member asked if there were any major issues with regard to staffing within the Authority.

The Chief Executive advised that whilst some posts within the Authority that were vacant did not have a significant impact on the provision of services, other frontline or professional vacancies that had been subject to 'shrinkage' in terms of the number of staff, inevitably did have some negative impact for the Authority. The majority of the Council's budget was spent on salaries for employees, and due to this, he felt that perhaps the Committee at a future meeting should look at and scrutinise workforce data.

The Chief Executive added that he was undertaking a piece of work that would be soon presented to Council, regarding a review of his Senior Management staffing complement. He further added that expectation for the way the Authority changed and progressed its work through leaner and more innovative ways to continue due to ongoing financial restraints. This was required in order to continue to adequately provide services to/for the public.

The Chairperson felt that Table 1 on page 18 of the report entitled 'Comparison of budget against projected outturn at 31 December 2107', needed a further column inserted in this, that detailed underspends being carried over to the next financial year to negate any overspends.

The Chief Executive responded by stating that as Members were examining the Quarter 3 period, there was no requirement at the present time to encourage any planned underspends. He assured Members that through bodies such as Cabinet/CMB, CMB and CPA, Management ensured that any underspends and overspends affecting Directorates negated each other by year end.

A Member referred to page 47 of the report, which contained a Table entitled 'Total movement on Earmarked Reserves as at 31/12/2017'. She to the Chief Executive Partnership Reserve, and asked what this signified and if it was a new earmarked reserve.

The Chief Executive thought that this was a financial commitment to the funding of the Public Service Board (PSB), though he advised the Member that he would confirm this to her outside of the meeting. He added however, that it was not of an operational nature.

A Member asked how BCBC's Reserves compared with that of other neighbouring authorities.

The Chief Executive responded by saying that Council's Reserves were based on a number of factors that made it difficult to accurately respond to this question. It was based on factors such as the percentage of the authorities turnover, and that larger Council's usually held bigger reserves. It was also dependent upon differing settlements to local authorities from Welsh Government, where the better the deal meant that more reserves could be set aside. The benchmark however, was that BCBC had enough in reserves to support what it needed to, as well as to deal with any un-anticipated crisis, and he was therefore happy with the current level of reserves.

In summary the Chief Executive advised that the report was headline material, but that perhaps for the next and end of quarter, further information would be appreciated by Committee on staffing within the Council, with more of a forensic analysis being included in future reports, on the Capital Programme and how Council functioned in relation to the Scrutiny Forward Work Programme.

At this point in the meeting, the Chairperson invited in the Corporate Director – Operational and Partnership Services.

The Corporate Director – Operational and Partnership Services advised the meeting that as things presently stood, his Directorate was estimated overall to have a healthy underspend come year end.

He then gave a resume of expenditure and outturn with regard to the different service areas that were included within his Directorate.

In respect of Housing options and homelessness, the Corporate Director – Operational and Partnership Services confirmed that the net under spend of £214,000 is a combination of reduced costs on temporary accommodation, following the receipt of non-recurrent grant funding, and also vacancy savings across the service, including in community safety. In October 2017, Council approved the use of £120,000 of the service under spend towards structural repairs at Brynmenyn Homelessness Unit. A further commitment has been made to meet the cost of an out of county housing related placement. Any recurrent savings will be put towards the MTFS for next year.

The under spend on legal services he advised, was due mainly to staffing vacancies, and some under spends on non-pay budgets. These would be considered as part of the MTFS for 2018-19.

For Members and Mayoral Services, the majority of the projected under spend (£145,000) was in respect of the Members' Community Action Fund following the delay in implementation of this after the Council elections in May. Any under spend will be carried forward and ring-fenced for Members to use prior to the end of October 2018, as agreed in the training provided.

For Customer Services, the under spend related partly to posts held vacant in preparation for future MTFS savings, in addition to savings arising from a temporary secondment to progress digital transformation, which is funded from an earmarked reserve (£62,000), and under spends on superannuation costs (£42,000).

Finally, the Corporate Director – Operational and Partnership Services confirmed that the net over spend in the ICT Department had arisen as a result of under spends on vacancies within the team, along with a further under spend of approximately £275,000 on software licences, which are offset by revenue contributions to capital for investment in PCs, digital meeting rooms, and data storage, totalling £790,000, as approved by Council on 4th October 2017. The majority of the savings on software are ring-fenced for 2018-19 MTFS savings.

A Member noted from the above, that there were a number of staffing vacancies within the Operational and Partnership Services Directorate, and he asked if this was bearing a strain on both existing staff and service delivery.

The Corporate Director – Operational and Partnership Services, advised that staff were under pressure with their respective workloads, but as a significant amount of his underspend had also come from the non-staffing side of his budget, he was able to approach the Corporate Centre of the Authority in order to find a resource to strengthen his staffing compliment in any pressure areas, if and when, this was required.

He added that it was difficult to recruit and retain lawyers in certain specialised areas, particularly in the area of Contracts and Procurement. However, he had been able to recently recruit within the Authority two trainee lawyers who had recently fully qualified.

Staff in his Directorate also undertook electronic time recording, which documented areas of work they covered during the course of a working day and the hours they worked, so from this, he was able to detect staff or sections of his Directorate that were under pressure from a work perspective. The use of trainees and apprentices were increasing throughout the Authority in order to give much needed extra support the existing workforce.

A Member asked how the partnership aspect of the Operational and Partnership Services Directorate was progressing. He was aware that the Commissioner of SW Police had increased its precept by 7%, and that there was £5m available through this in order to progress local projects.

The Corporate Director – Operational and Partnership Services advised that the collaboration of Public Protection involving the Council's of Bridgend, Cardiff and the Vale, was progressing well, and if Bridgend had not joined this, then further cuts to staff would have had to be made, including in the forthcoming year. There had been problems experienced in recruiting staff in the Trading Standards section of the Public Protection collaboration, and therefore the recruitment of agency staff and/or trainees or apprentices were being explored for additional support, as inspections of retail premises were behind schedule. He confirmed that as the Police are a partner of the Council, by virtue of the Community Safety Partnership, then he could explore avenues with a view to bidding for an apportionment of the £5m funding as highlighted above

The Member added, that the Police Commissioner confirmed that the Police had indicated that the 7 Unitary Authorities within the boundary area it covered, were able to put bids in for any local project work they proposed, and that these could be supported by the Council's representative on the Police and Crime Panel.

At this point in the meeting, the Corporate Director – Communities and the Cabinet Member – Communities were invited to the meeting.

The Corporate Director – Communities advised that the net budget for the Directorate for 2017-18 is £23.795m, and the current projection was an anticipated under spend of 12k, with the main variances being shown in respect of all the service areas in the Table on pages 25/26 of the report.

A Member noted that as part of the budget proposals, there was an under spend of approximately £500k, due to current staff vacancies in the different sections that comprised the Directorate. He asked what effect this had on staffing and the Directorates budget overall.

The Corporate Director – Communities advised that there were staff vacancies in Property (Estates) Landlord, Parks and Open Spaces, Street Scene and Network Management. The first of these sections was being restructured, and therefore the problems with recruiting in this section would hopefully be finalised. The £500k of savings he added would eventually be realised, and would contribute towards hopefully more suitably skilled individuals being employed, though he pointed out, that he was finding some difficulty with regard to recruiting qualified Surveyors in the Property Section.

A Member noted from page 26 of the report that there was a projected under spend of £100k, which had arisen following the LGBTI programme and replacements of lanterns and subsequent reduction in energy costs and required maintenance. He asked if this was to be eventually re-invested into new street lighting, or alternatively, committed to the corporate budget.

The Corporate Director – Communities advised that every street light would eventually be in the form of LED lighting, and that this was being funded by Welsh Government, after an initial borrowing period. He added that this would be a 3 – 5 year programme, and would result in savings in both energy and monetary costs. The savings overall would pay for the loan.

A Member added that perhaps help could be forthcoming from certain Town and Community Councils in respect of financial assistance for the above, from their precepts.

A Member further added, that she was happy that lighting in the form of LED was being provided, and that this should be conveyed to the tax payer, ie that the Council were looking at ways to become more environmentally friendly, at the same time cutting costs.

The Corporate Director – Communities further added that an assessment was also being carried out to see what lighting columns needed replacing, and to establish if some of these could or needed to be removed from their existing places and moved to perhaps other areas where they were more needed. He stated that an investment programme was being carried out, and that he would send this to Committee Members when this was fully completed.

The Chairperson at this stage of the meeting invited in the Interim Corporate Director – Education and Family Support.

A Member expressed some concerns regarding the projected overspend for School Transport provision, as detailed in the report.

The Interim Corporate Director – Education and Family Support, advised that this overspend was in the region of £300k, and that ways were being looked at to reduce these costs by perhaps jointly using transport with Social Services or the introduction of joint/collaborative working by entering into Contracts with neighbouring authorities for the purpose of providing transport initiatives, should this be feasible and achievable. He added that £4.7m of the Directorates budget was spent on transport costs, which as Members would appreciate, is a considerable amount.

With regard to Schools delegated budgets, a Member asked if the Education Department provided advice and guidance on these to School Management teams (SMT's) and the School governing body, so that they are aware of how to best manage their budgets more effectively.

The Interim Corporate Director – Education and Family Support advised that training was given to both SMT's and governing bodies. Regional support in this area was also provided by the Central South Consortium. .

A Member referred to page 23 of the report, and the fact that Safe route (to school) assessments had not been progressed as quickly as anticipated, but should be completed by the end of the year. She asked when this was.

The Interim Corporate Director – Education and Family Support stated that this was the end of the academic year in July. Safe Routes to Schools, once the assessments had been completed, would inform other things such as transport routes and catchment areas.

The Corporate Director – Social Services and Wellbeing was then invited to the meeting with the Cabinet Member – Social Services and Early Help.

A Member referred to page 24 of the report, where it was stated that there was a projected over spend of £200k against older person services in total. The reason being was due to MTFS budget reductions being applied to the budget, but actual savings being unrealised to date. He asked the Invitee if she could expand as to what these unrealised savings were.

The Corporate Director – Social Services and Wellbeing explained that this related to older people, and savings looking to be fully secured in areas such as residential care, domiciliary care and respite care. All the savings that had been earmarked in these service areas had not as yet been realised, so this had been made a priority for the Directorate in 2018/19, and a Directorate Financial Action Plan had been put in place to achieve such savings. She added that the budget for domiciliary care was increasing, as less people were requiring residential care. Work was therefore ongoing, in order to reducing care packages across the whole spectrum of Adult Social Care, and together with more innovative ways of working, this would lead to the savings required eventually being achieved.

A Member asked what the long term scenario was in respect of numbers of Looked After Children (LAC).

The Corporate Director – Social Services and Wellbeing, advised that she was hopeful that the numbers of LAC would be safely reduced in the future, as increased numbers had resulted in an overspend of around £1m in each of the last few years. She added that in 2016-17 around £10.3m had been spent on LAC, while this had reduced to £9.8m in 2017-18. There was a long term Strategy to keep children wherever possible in care arrangements locally as opposed to Out of County provision, which was far more expensive, but also sometimes necessary and therefore unavoidable. She stated that a report with proposals for re-modelling Bridgend's in-house residential care, was being considered by Cabinet next week entitled future remodelling proposals for Children's Residential Care.

A Member felt that the vast numbers of children having to be placed in specialist Out of County care was a common problem being experienced by most, if not all local authorities, and the expense attached to this for any local authority was almost unmanageable. He felt that this was something that should be taken up nationally by all welsh local authorities. He added that it should also be made more transparent to the public, how much the local authority spend on LAC.

The Corporate Director – Social Services and Wellbeing advised that she had sent a survey just last week to the Care Inspectorate for Wales, that included information as to how many LAC the Authority presently had, in order that this could form part of national statistics. She was aware that the Councils of Camden and Newport had reduced numbers of LAC compared to most other authorities. She added that this was not just about social services but early help and intervention which was part of the Education and Family Support directorate as it was important to continue to develop early help and intervention measures.

Conclusions:

1. In addition to Members attendance at formal meetings being recorded and available for the public to view, the Committee recommended that the attendance of Chief Officers required at each overview and Scrutiny Committee should also be recorded and made available to the public. Members were disappointed that there was no representative from finance available to attend a Scrutiny meeting that related to a Budget monitoring item, therefore members were unable to get the answers they required on certain points in the report. The Committee further recommended that if the

lead officer for a particular item is not available to attend then an appropriate representative should be sent in their place

2. Members recommended an audit of vacancies across the whole Authority to include the following:

- How many vacancies are there across the whole Authority
- How long they have been vacant for
- The reasons for them being vacant – budget related or difficulties recruiting
- A breakdown of the vacancies within each Directorate so members are able to see exactly what posts are vacant
- The impact on the service area due to number of vacant posts
- Information from Trade Unions in relation to the direct impact on staff for each Directorate

3. Members recommended that future budget monitoring items detail more information in relation to the underspends in each Directorate so members could see exactly what impact the underspends has to the service

4. Members requested receive further information relating to the slippage of schemes and new approvals for the Capital Programme into 2018-19. The Chief Executive agreed to detail this in the next budget monitoring item to the Committee

5. Members recommended that a Community Safety Plan be established for Bridgend. It is proposed that the plan includes how the Authority are working collaboratively with external partners such as South Wales Police to secure grant funding in respect of Community Safety.

6. Members requested clarification on the £50,000 projected underspend relating to the tender of new play equipment and if this related to the revenue budget

7. Members welcomed the LED replacement lighting throughout the Borough and recommended that this news is shared with the public as it was pleasing to hear of the potential future savings that this project could achieve

8. Members recommended communicating with Town and Community Councils to see if there was interest in them subsidising the costs towards the replacement of the pillars/ lanterns for the streetlights as some were in desperate need of repair and replacement and members understood there was an appetite from some TCCs to contribute to get this completed more timely

9. Members requested information on the process for the replacement of street lighting within the Borough including the criteria used to prioritise the areas for replacement first.

10. Members were pleased to hear that Education and Family support Directorate would be working in Partnership with the Social Services and Wellbeing Directorate to explore options to rationalise home to school transport and encouraged the dual use of the mini buses, working in partnership with other Local Authorities and exploring the option of bringing the service back in house.

11. Members were concerned at the responsibility of schools managing their individual budgets and sought reassurance from Officers that schools were fully supported and that the relevant staff and governors received regular training to allow them to effectively manage their budgets.



12. Members remained concerned at the projected overspend in the Social Services and Wellbeing Directorate and asked that at their next meeting where the Social Services and Wellbeing Director was due to bring a report to the Committee on the Directorate Financial Plan that the report include detail on how savings will be realised against the following areas:

- Services to older people
- Looked After Children
- Care at Home for Adults with Learning disabilities

44. URGENT ITEMS

None.

The meeting closed at 12:45