

CORPORATE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - WEDNESDAY, 12 DECEMBER 2018

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE CORPORATE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
HELD IN COUNCIL CHAMBER - CIVIC OFFICES ANGEL STREET BRIDGEND CF31 4WB
ON WEDNESDAY, 12 DECEMBER 2018 AT 10:00**

Present

Councillor CA Green – Chairperson

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|--------------|-----------------------|-------------|--------------|
| JPD Blundell | N Clarke | J Gebbie | T Giffard |
| M Jones | RL Penhale- Thomas | B Sedgebeer | JC Spanswick |
| CA Webster | | | |

Apologies for Absence

Councillors P Davies, L Walters, R Stirman, J Tildesley, T Thomas, M Clarke, R Shaw, K Rowlands, S Vidal, M Voisey, A Williams.

Officers:

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| Julie Ellams | Democratic Services Officer - Committees |
| Gail Jewell | Democratic Services Officer - Scrutiny |
| Gill Lewis | Interim Head of Finance and Section 151 Officer |
| Michael Pitman | Business & Administrative Apprentice |
| Tracy Watson | Scrutiny Officer |
| Kelly Watson | Head of Legal & Regulatory Services |

Invitees:

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| Hannah Castle | Head Teacher, Cynffig Comprehensive School |
| Neil Clode | Head Teacher, Llangewydd Primary School |
| William Bond | Special School Sector |
| Ciaron Jackson | Primary School Sector |
| Darren Mephram | Chief Executive |
| Mark Shephard | Interim Chief Executive |
| Nicola Echanis | Head of Education & Family Support |
| Lindsay Harvey | Corporate Director Education and Family Support |
| Zak Shell | Head of Neighbourhood Services |
| Councillor Huw David | Leader |
| Councillor Hywel Williams | Deputy Leader |
| Councillor Dhanisha Patel | Cabinet Member for Wellbeing and Future Generations |
| Councillor Richard Young | Cabinet Member Communities |
| Councillor Elaine Venables | Chairperson Democratic Services Committee |
| Councillor Aniel Pucella | |
| Councillor Julia Williams | |
| Councillor Ken Watts | |

92. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor C Webster declared a personal interest in agenda item 4 – Medium Term Financial Strategy 2019-20 to 2022-23 as she had a child in secondary education in the County Borough who was in receipt of home to school transport.

93. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting of the 6 November 2018 be approved as a true and accurate record.

94. **MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2019-20 TO 2022-23**

The Interim Head of Finance and Section 151 Officer presented the draft Medium Term Financial Strategy 2019-20 to 2022-23 for Members to consider the information contained in the report and determine comments or recommendations for consolidation and inclusion in the report to Cabinet as part of the budget consultation process. She added that on 19 December 2018 the final settlement would be available but in the meantime she was asking the Committee to prioritise proposed reductions, consider changes to the Council Tax or to proceed with the reductions detailed in the report.

The Chairperson invited the Chairperson of SOSC3, Cllr J Spanswick for comments on table 7 of the report, the Draft Revenue Budget 2019-20. He explained that he was frustrated by the disparity of cuts. He disagreed with the budget pressure item relating to Rights of Way and the proposals relating to further reductions to other cleaning services (COM41 and COM41a) which would result in the service becoming purely reactive. This would result in many complaints not being addressed and referrals not being actioned. An alternative to this could be increasing charges. He would like to see any additional funding used to reduce cuts to outdoor leisure facilities and play areas and for these services to be protected from here on in.

The Corporate Director Communities explained that the level of cuts was a political decision based on priorities and it was inevitable that some services would face larger cuts than others. Some savings could be achieved through smarter ways of working but in other areas cuts would have to be made. There would be an impact on street cleansing but the impact could be mitigated by working closely with Town and Community Councils.

The Head of Neighbourhood Services explained that the budget pressure relating to "Rights of Way- Statutory duty to undertake the first decennial review of the Council's Rights of Way Improvement Plan by October 2019" was because there had been substantial cuts in that area leaving a small team with a large workload. It was unrealistic to expect that team to complete the work required to apply for funding and if that work was not completed they could lose out on future funding.

A Member asked for the headline results for this directorate from the consultation. The Interim Head of Finance and Section 151 Officer explained that she did not have the findings in total but she could give a brief outline.

- 50% of respondents felt that cultural services could be reduced.
- 60% stated that they would be willing to pay more to access sports facilities, pavilions and parks.
- 79% of respondents stated that Blue Badge holders should pay for parking.
- 48% of respondents believed that the council should explore the option of charging for shop mobility.
- 42% of respondents disagreed with the proposal to remove subsidies from bus services.
- 46% agreed the bus station should be closed to make budget savings.
- 53% were willing to pay £20 for three bulky item collection.
- The most popular services to protect were schools, care of older people, services for the disabled and leisure services.
- Services selected for cuts were libraries, art centres, theatres, sports and recreation, weed spraying, funding for post 16 transport and the separate collection for absorbent hygiene products.

A Member asked for an update on litter enforcement. The Head of Neighbourhood Services explained that the contract for an enforcement service was currently out to tender and that it should be in place by the start of the next financial year.

A Member referred to redundant equipment if the reductions to cleaning services were implemented. The Head of Neighbourhood Services reported that they could discuss this with the Town Councils although some equipment was leased so it would not be possible in all instances.

A Member asked how long it would be if the cuts continued, before the authority collapsed. The Corporate Director Communities explained that changes had to be made. It was vital to develop new relationships with Town and Community Councils (TCC's) about what could and could not be achieved. There were good examples in England where there was more collaborative working.

A Member referred to the transfer of pitches and pavilions and asked if the TCC's were aware of the issues. The Corporate Director Communities explained that there would be a public consultation in the new year and this would help shape the report to Cabinet and the way forward.

The Cabinet Member Communities explained that in addition to the consultation they would also be talking to the TCC's regarding CAT and the new stream lined application process.

The Chairperson of SOSC3 stated that the outcome of the consultation depended on how the questions were asked. In his opinion the questions were weighted and in future the committee would like to see the consultation questions before they were circulated.

The Chairperson invited the Chairperson of SOSC1, Cllr C Webster for comments on the draft revenue budget. She stated that she had concerns about the review of leadership of the Inclusion Services, Home to School Transport the safety of children and the impact on their education. There was huge disparity across Wales and this could have an impact on children's educations.

The Corporate Director, Education and Family Support explained that the review of leadership within the Inclusion Service was currently out for consultation and would close on 10 January 2019. Staff at both primary and secondary schools had received updates and substantial savings had been identified. It was a time of flux and they were still considering the full ramifications whilst protecting front line services.

A Member referred to the reduction to the contribution to the Central South Consortium (CSC) and asked if it was worth paying and we were getting value for money. He also asked what a 1% cut to schools would look like.

The Corporate Director, Education and Family Support explained that regional working was established as part of an agreement with Welsh Government. There had been year on year reductions since 2015 equivalent to a decrease of 12%. An independent agency had been appointed to see if CSC was providing value for money. He added that standards in Bridgend were improving. Other authorities were seeking higher cuts and back office staff and accommodation had already been reduced.

A Member stated that with youth crime on the increase, a reduction in staff would result in fewer opportunities to intervene. She asked what provision there would be if the authority withdrew from Western Bay. The Head of Education and Family Services

agreed and said this was a critical time for the YOS. Significant savings had already been made without losing any staff.

The primary/secondary school representatives were invited to comment on the proposals. They reported that the Challenge Advisor work provided by CSC could be strong but variable. Bridgend was relatively small within the Consortium but this allowed an opportunity for regional working and to call on a range of expertise. With reference to the 1% cuts, they said that this would have an impact on the learning environment. A 1% cut could impact on extra-curricular activities, music provision and possibly swimming lessons if austerity continued.

A Member asked if there would be a risk of the 1% cut pushing more schools further into deficit. The Corporate Director, Education and Family Support explained that approximately half of the schools had a deficit budget at year end. Officers supported the schools to recover from that position and he explained that they had a statutory duty to balance the books within three years and the finance officers worked closely with the schools to achieve this.

A member suggested that non statutory nursery education could be reduced from 30 hours to 10 hours and this would give a saving of £1.8 million.

The Leader stated that education was the most important service the authority provided and an investment in the future. It could lift people out of poverty and the authority had managed to avoid cuts in this area for many years. There was robust evidence that in order to make a difference, support was required in early years. Full time provision had made a huge difference and there would be a massive impact on both parents and children if it was reduced. He had had discussions with Welsh Government ministers about the child care offer across Wales and extra money had been identified. In relation to the CSC, Welsh Government was very committed to regional working and efforts were made to ensure the authority received value for money.

A Member had grave concerns regarding the removal of Post 16 transport. He said that within the borough, there were some of the most disadvantaged communities in the whole of Wales and this was a lifeline and a vehicle to opportunity. He asked how this worked against future generation proposals to create a more equal Wales. The Corporate Director Education and Family Support explained that there was a challenge around transport and currently there was a £570,000 overspend. Over the last 5 years, they had saved £2 million and they were now looking at the non- statutory element equal to £450,000. In addition there was an increased ALN pressure. The bespoke taxi service was very challenging and it was difficult to secure savings. A review into school transport had been undertaken and savings had been achieved via safe routes to school.

The primary/secondary school representatives stated that if post 16 transport was removed some pupils might not continue in education, in particular deprived children who would be denied the opportunity to continue education. The removal of non- statutory nurse provision could have a huge impact on children. The baseline was getting worse each year and outcomes would be affected. A registered representative agreed that there would be an impact on children if they did not have this opportunity.

A Member raised concerns regarding the home to school transport, removal of escorts proposals. Children would be vulnerable if there was no escort and this could encourage bullying and driver distraction. He said that for the sake of £35,000, there was a high risk of children being damaged mentally or physically and this proposal was a non- starter.

The Leader stated that if austerity did end then this could be a cut that they would not make and he shared their concerns regarding this and other savings. The incidence and

complexity of cases of children with ALN was rising and this area required more investment. There was a proposal to invest £320,000 in secondary schools for children with ALN, in recognition of increased needs and complexity. The Corporate Director Education and Family Support added that if agreed, this cut would not “kick in” for 2/3 years

A Member raised the issues of the removal of bus subsidies and the removal of post 16 transport. She suggested that the two work together. The Corporate Director Education and Family Support stated that they would work together to maximise opportunity and minimise risk. The Leader was also speaking to Transport for Wales regarding the increase in their budget and the most effective ways to invest. They would work together to ensure that the proposals complimented each other.

A Member stated that this was a huge challenge for schools and that they should be seeking external funding. The Leader explained that he was continuing to lobby both Welsh Government and UK government, making a case for additional support. He was waiting for clarification from Welsh Government regarding pension costs for teachers being fully funded.

The Chairperson of SOSC3 said that he accepted that the 1% cut would be difficult but all directorates had to work together. He stated that schools had been protected previously but this could not continue in future. Millions had been invested into 21st Century Schools and it was unfair to continue to protect schools. He believed the Governing Bodies needed to “wake up” and start challenging head teachers to find cuts where they would do least harm.

The Chairperson of SOSC1 explained that she understood the issues around reducing nursery provision. She had major concerns regarding learner transport and the importance of children having a comfortable journey to avoid anxiety. There was a statutory requirement for an escort if identified in a child’s statement but she believed the authority was poor at providing statements. She added that the Festival of Learning was a huge success for the Corporate Director particularly in terms of training and shared good practice. The Consortium did provide support and she was pleased to see that savings had been made and they were now in more appropriate accommodation.

A Member requested further information regarding the reduction in central budget for 1:1 support and the review of the Education Psychology Service.

The primary/secondary school representative said that he believed funds should be held centrally so that they could follow the child. He was not sure how they would be able to support children if funding was not provided in this way.

The Chief Executive outlined the budget reduction proposals in his directorate and explained that savings had to be robust and the consequences of any cuts understood.

A Member stated that the he was disappointed that the Community Action Fund was being removed because it was a good scheme.

A Member requested further information regarding the review of homelessness prevention, the name of the external organisation and if the cuts would deplete the capacity to support the homeless. The Chief Executive explained that there was an historic significant underspend and this could force other services to make cuts that might not be necessary. There was no specific external organisation however the concept was being explored with housing associations. They were looking to see if a housing association would be interested in taking this on and if the service could be provided more efficiently and effectively.

A Member asked if it was sensible to freeze/delete vacant posts and to review structures. The Chief Executive explained that there was a heavy restructure within his directorate and it was important to get the structure right across customer contact, communications and marketing, housing and performance. They were looking at how they administered data and relationships with external regulators such as WAO. Teams could be spending time unnecessarily collecting information and representing it in a different format. This could shift the emphasis to support management decisions and help stimulate performance in a different way.

A Member raised the potential for income generation in areas such as police/ community safety/CCTV, road repairs and charging for filming. A business- like approach should be adopted to generate income in addition to traditional methods.

The Chief Executive responded that charging for filming had not been identified for income generation because there did not appear to be a lot of filming within the borough. English authorities were venturing into areas such as training, running public houses, hotels and supermarkets but there were issues with all of these. There was also an ongoing conversation with a London authority where potentially it could be cheaper to buy support in than from the public sector.

Communities

Following the Committee's consideration of the draft budget proposals for the Communities Directorate, Members determined to make the following comments and recommendations:

General Comments

- The Committee voiced their disappointment with the disparity of cuts across the Directorate and how the Communities Directorate were looking at 8% cut to their budget whilst others - when including Growth - are only facing 1.8% cut.
- In relation to COM14a, Members raised concerns regarding the impact of the budget reduction proposals to the cleaning services and the probability that the service will work on a reactive basis only. Therefore Members welcome the Directorates statement that any excess Council owned equipment would be provided to Town and Community Councils on a case by case basis to carry out cleaning services to counteract the probable litter on the roadside.

Recommendations

The Committee commented that visible services should be protected from budget reductions, in particular cleaning services. Members therefore recommend that if the Council should receive any additional funds from Welsh Government that consideration should be given to retaining monies to offset COM41 and COM41a.

During their discussions regarding COM42 and COM42a, the Committee recommend that communication is distributed to Town and Community Councils and the voluntary sector to inform them of the proposed budget reductions. The Committee was pleased to hear that the Council is streamlining the process for Community Asset Transfer to assist with a more effective process for all parties.

The Committee recommend that prior to the public Budget Consultation being finalised next year that Budget Research and Evaluation Panel receive the proposed questions in the consultation to ensure there are some direct questions regarding the proposed budget reductions as opposed to more generic questions that could be misinterpreted.

Education & Family Support

Following the Committee's consideration of the draft budget proposals for the Education & Family Support Directorate, Members determined to make the following comments and recommendations:

General Comments

- In relation to EFS33, Members raised concerns with the possible removal of supervisors on primary school bus services with fewer than 8 pupils and highlighted that the removal would leave children vulnerable and cause driver distraction. The Committee concluded that the risk of children being damaged mentally or physically was too high for a potential £35,000 saving.
- The Committee expressed some concern with budget reduction proposal EFS41 – the removal of post 16 transport, as the reduction would impact the most deprived areas within the Borough who may not continue their education without the supplied transport. Members also highlighted the negative effect the proposal would in turn have on probable increase of you people not engaged in education, employment or training. The Committee concluded that the cuts to education should be considered alongside the reduction to bus subsidies.
- During discussions regarding the efficiency savings against School Delegated Budget - SCH1 – the Committee highlighted the need for governors to vigorously challenge head teachers on their budgets and explore all possibilities for income generation in a bid to offset the possible 1% budget cut.

Recommendations

The Committee commented on the potential financial impact the proposed efficiency saving against the school budgets would have on schools that were already in deficit and the increased difficulty it would impose on recovering from that position within the statutory timeframe. Members therefore recommend that if the Council should receive any additional funds from Welsh Government that consideration should be given to retaining monies to offset SCH01.

Chief Executive

Following the Committee's consideration of the draft budget proposals for the Chief Executive Directorate, Members determined to make the following comments and recommendations:

Recommendations

The Committee discussed the Members Community Action Fund and whilst Members agree with the principle of the project, they cannot support the funding to continue and therefore recommend that the Directorate continue with the removal of the Members' Community Action Fund.

Corporate Overview

Members highlighted the need for the Council to undertake increased corporate vigilance which in turn could generate income. The Committee provided the following proposals:

Recommendations

As outlined in Budget Research and Evaluation Panel the Committee recommend that Bridgend Council should introduce fees and charges to align with other Councils; explore the possibility of charging companies and members of the public when they have damaged Council property; explore joint funding with the Police for operating the CCTV service.

In addition to the aforementioned comments, the Committee recommend that the Council explore the possibility of introducing fines for members of the public that damage public property and do not adhere to the highway code by making full use of

CCTV already in place in Bridgend and the BCBC owned camera car used to deter dangerous parking around schools in the Borough.

95. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE

The Scrutiny Officer presented the feedback from previous meetings and the Committee noted the information including any responses still outstanding.

Members suggested prioritising items for committees one month in advance to take into account any late items that could arise. The Scrutiny Officer explained that officers required more notice to prepare reports and suggested that 2 months would be easier to work with.

Members requested that when the CAMHS item was considered, the Chairperson of Bridgend Community Health Council should be invited to attend. The Scrutiny Officer explained that the review of the Fostering Project was already being scrutinised by other bodies and that it should be retained on the forward work programme as an information item.

- Members requested that when the CAMHS item was considered, the Chairperson of Bridgend Community Health Council should be invited to attend;
- Members agreed to receive the review of the Fostering Project as information only as it was to be discussed at Corporate Parenting on 10 January 2019.

The Committee confirmed the following items for the Subject Overview and Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme:

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|------------------|--------|----------------------------------|
| 24 January 2019 | SOSC 3 | Revised CAT Process |
| 29 January 2019 | SOSC 2 | Direct Payment Scheme |
| 30 January 2019 | SOSC 1 | Education Outcomes |
| 26 February 2019 | SOSC 3 | Empty Properties |
| 28 February 2019 | SOSC 1 | Supported People Programme Grant |
| 27 March 2019 | SOSC 2 | CAMHS |

96. URGENT ITEMS

None

The meeting closed at 13:30