

Report of the Budget Research and Evaluation Panel 2018

- 1.1 The Budget Research and Evaluation Panel (BREP) has considered the draft budget proposals for the year 2018-19.
- 1.2 The Panel met on six occasions and were supported by a Scrutiny Officer, Interim Section 151 Officer and the Deputy Leader.
- 1.3 The October meeting involved individual presentations from all Corporate Directors and Chief Executive detailing the impact that the budget plans and proposals would make to their Directorate.
- 1.4 The work of the BREP helps to ensure financial transparency and accountability with regard to the draft budget proposals. 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 and the challenging financial outlook.
- 1.5 The BREP acknowledge the financial challenges facing the Authority and agreed that a forward thinking approach is required when taking into account the overall budget savings which are required from 2019-2023 and should avoid any duplication with the work of the Subject Overview and Scrutiny Committees.
- 1.6 BREP Members are aware of the pressures on each Directorate when compiling and meeting budget savings year on year which left little opportunity for BREP to suggest additional budget saving proposals, although BREP were able to provide views on what proposals were acceptable and which were not.

Legislative Pressures

- 1.7 The Panel acknowledged legislative pressures with significant financial implications, such as Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Bill which are imposed by Welsh Government and note that most are enforced without any additional monies.

Recommendation 1

Members recommend that research is undertaken into how the Authority is able to deliver services imposed by Welsh Government without any additional monies as outlined in paragraph 1.7 and meet the associated additional costs - A pan Wales approach may well be more valuable. This will provide the evidence needed to enable the Council to lobby for supplementary monies to carry out legislative pressures effectively. In addition to this the Panel recommend that any lobbying for extra funding is carried out publically, to demonstrate to the public how much services costs and how much has allocated to each service.

2 MTFS Budget Reduction Proposals for 2019-20 to 2022-23

- 2.1 When the draft Budget Reduction Proposals for 2019-20 to 2022-23 were presented to BREP, Members acknowledged the numerous potential restructures and staffing reconfigurations proposed throughout each of the Directorates.

Recommendation 2

Members recommend that in relation to any departmental restructure a corporate approach is instigated across all Directorates, taking a bottom up approach. The Panel further recommend that any reorganisation is carried out following discussions and thorough planning by Cabinet/CMB. The Panel identified that this may well be suitable to form one of a number of annual objectives for the new Chief Executive.

Communities

- 2.2 The Panel requested and received a presentation from the Corporate Director Communities setting out the proposed budget cuts for the Directorate and the probable impact the proposals would generate on his area and the citizens of Bridgend.

Recommendation 3

Members state that some of the proposed budget reductions in this Directorate will provide small savings in the short term but will incur costs in the future. The Panel used the reduction of weed spraying as a short term example, stating that in the long run it could impact on members of the public safety and highway maintenance. Therefore the Panel recommend that longer term strategic proposals are deliberated and different models of service delivery are explored, such as external businesses that could provide services more economically.

Collaboration with Town and Community Councils (TCCs)

- 2.3 During their discussions Members voiced their disappointment with the lack of progress on improving communication and collaborative working with TCC's following the recommendations made by BREP the previous year. There was no information available to suggest a pro-active approach was being undertaken. The Panel concluded discussions by highlighting the need to empower TCC's as they are best placed to identify what the community requires.

Recommendation 4

Although the Panel are mindful of the extra resources required to improve collaboration and communication with TCC's and also between TCC's themselves, Members recommend that a Cabinet led approach is undertaken to explore options to take this forward. The Panel also recommend Cabinet revisit the Terms of Reference of the Town and Community Council Forum to ensure the Membership of the Forum is representative and that additional powers are allocated to it, such as making recommendations. Furthermore, the Panel propose the creation of a Memorandum of Understanding between both parties.

Recommendation 5

The Panel recommend that Cabinet take the lead in approaching all stakeholders regarding their potential for Community Asset Transfer (CAT) of all outdoor leisure facilities as outlined in the Budget Reduction Proposals 2019-20 to 2022-23.

- 2.4 The Panel identified a lack of initial communication with local Members and TCC's regarding potential Cabinet decisions relating to CAT and actual Cabinet resolution of asset closures.

Recommendation 6

With reference to the lack of communication regarding potential Cabinet decisions relating to CAT, the Panel therefore recommend that Cabinet reviews its communication plan on CAT to ensure that all relevant information is distributed to all Local Members and TCC's for information.

- 2.5 BREP feels that Recommendation 4 will ensure that Members and appropriate local councils can actively assist and support the decision-making process.
- 2.6 The Panel identified most TCC's have previously advised that they would be willing to make a contribution to services at a local level such as bus subsidies, school crossing patrols and grass cutting.

Waste

- 2.7 The Panel welcomed the improved performance of re-cycling across the Borough, however the Panel highlighted their concerns regarding any future changes to the current Waste Contract with Kier. This will ensure that public finances get best value and the reputation of the Council is protected.
- 2.8 The Panel discussed the reductions to the budget for the Materials Recovery and Energy Centre (MREC) and identified that MREC is a Corporate budgetary pressure.

Recommendation 7

In relation to the Materials Recovery and Energy Centre (MREC) the Panel recommend that a political solution is sought to negotiate a favourable outcome for all parties involved.

Bridgend Bus Station

- 2.9 During discussions regarding the possible closure of Bridgend Bus Station, the Panel expressed concerns with incorrect information being provided by some public service suppliers in relation to the closure. Members highlighted the uneasiness the information is having on members of the public and the negative impact on the Council's reputation.

Recommendation 8

In relation to comments being made about the possible closure of the Bus Station the Panel recommend that a press release is provided by Corporate Communications outlining the fact that the Council are exploring alternative measures for full cost recovery for Bridgend Bus Station and that there are no plans for closure of the building on 1st January 2019.

- 2.10 BREP agreed to revisit the budget reduction proposal regarding Bridgend Bus Station following the outcome of the Supported bus consultation 2019 to 2020.

Education

- 2.11 In relation to the removal of Post 16 Transport, the Panel expressed some concern regarding the budget reduction proposal being linked to the wellbeing goal of a more equal Wales, especially when the reduction of the transport would affect students travelling to both Maesteg and Coleg Cymunedol Y Dderwen comprehensive schools, which are situated in two of the most deprived areas in the Borough. Following further discussion, the Panel suggest that the Council should signpost students requiring Post 16 transport to alternative options, some of which are outlined in Recommendation 9 and 10.

Home to School Transport

Recommendation 9

In relation to the Home to School Transport review, Members were pleased to note that all aspects of transport will be explored, including vehicles used in day centres as BREP has previously recommended - slightly amending the opening and closing times of day centres so the buses can be made available for school transport. The Panel also recommend that the Directorate consider the possibility of collaborating with other local authorities and creating an in-house resource from the current fleet for Home to School transport use.

Recommendation 10

The Panel recommend introducing a charge for transport over and above Welsh Government statutory distances for Home to School Transport, which should take into account and offer concessions for low income families. Members further recommended that instead of removing the provision that the Council could provide a discounted bus pass on an existing bus route.

Nursery Provision

- 2.12 In relation to the reduction in early years provision from full time to part time as per statutory minimum, the Panel identified that the Council cannot justify providing discretionary services to the detriment of struggling to provide statutory services.
- 2.13 In order to plan for the future and to ensure Members understand the impact of the possible removal of Bridgend Councils nursery provision, the Panel request that a consultation and review be undertaken taking into account the following:

- Evidence of the impact of reducing to the statutory minimum on children's education;
- To explore and review what impact the reduction would make to working parents;
- To explore the possibility for the Council to provide the statutory 10 hours and parents/guardians to pay for the additional hours;
- The impact on current funding and staffing.

Recommendation 11

The Panel believe that the budget reduction proposal EFS49 which plans on decreasing the current nursery provision to the statutory minimum could have been implemented in previous years. Therefore Members recommend that consultation on this proposal should commence taking into consideration the proposed review process outlined in 2.13.

Efficiency savings against School Delegated Budgets

- 2.14 The Panel discussed the budget reduction SCH1 relating to the 1% efficiency saving against school delegated budgets and observed the implementation would be a matter for the individual school to manage and that continuation of funding the nursery provision has a contributory factor to schools being required to make the saving.

Recommendation 12

If the 1% school budget reduction is implemented the Panel recommend that the Council ensure that they work closely with all schools to provide financial support and advice to agree on a deficit plan. The Panel further recommend exploring the possibility of centralising the non-teaching aspect of all school budgets and re-charge for services which would ensure that services are properly remunerated.

Social Services and Wellbeing

- 2.15 The Panel acknowledged the amount of savings made by the Directorate to date and were conscious of the effects of fluctuating demand, the volume of complex issues within the service area and how this could impact on future budget proposals. The Panel note the previous significant overspends in this Directorate, although Members appreciate the progress of savings made to date. BREP have requested that Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Panel receive regular updates on the plan to monitor and review its effectiveness.
- 2.16 The Panel identified that the Social Services and Wellbeing Directorate issues with the bespoke process of grant funding for essential services and Members questioned the time and effort taken in monitoring and responding to ensure future funds are provided.
- 2.17 The Panel note that a report to Council will be produced to provide an update on the progress being made to meet the proposed Health Board boundary change in April 2019 and request that the report includes details of the budgetary impact on BCBC from moving services from ABMU to Cwm Taf.

Chief Executive

Community Action Fund

- 2.18 While deliberating the Chief Executive proposals for budget reductions, the Panel discussed the Community Action Fund and although the Members agree with the principle of the project they cannot support the funding to continue and therefore support the removal of the Members' Community Action Fund.

CCTV

- 2.19 During the Panels deliberations in relation to the review of the CCTV function and the potential impact it may pose on community safety, Members queried whether the Council had any financial contributions from the Police. The Panel also identified that this topic could be further explored by Scrutiny.

Recommendation 13

With reference to the joint responsibility between BCBC and Police for crime and disorder in the County and the integral part CCTV has to Police investigations, Members recommend that Cabinet explore joint funding with the Police for operating the CCTV service.

3 Fees and Charges

- 3.1 The Panel received a comprehensive report detailing comparison of fees and charges with other Local Authorities and Members complimented the vast amount of work that was undertaken to compile the spreadsheet.
- 3.2 Following the Panel's consideration of the Fees & Charges spreadsheet and discussions, Members note that the introduction of charges for some services would be quite straightforward - for example the replacement charges for licencing badges/plates and door stickers. Members also acknowledged the fact that the Council are not charging for advertising on Council property and for film licencing which could generate an income.

Recommendation 14

The Panel recommend that Cabinet and CMB receive the Fees & Charges – Comparison with other Local Authorities spreadsheet which collates all services that the Authority does not currently charge for where other neighbouring Councils do. The Panel further recommend that if it is financially viable that the Council introduce the appropriate charges to align with other Councils as soon as possible. The Panel also request that this topic is added to the Scrutiny Forward Work Programme to assist with income generation.

Recommendation 15

The Panel voiced their concerns regarding the lack of inspection following work carried out throughout the Borough. Members therefore

recommend that the Authority undertake corporate vigilance and explore the possibility of charging companies and members of the public when they have damaged Council property. Examples of general utility works on the highway which lead to long term road surface damage were identified. The Panel also identified Members corporate responsibility in reporting issues and damages as part of their local community role.

Recommendation 16

The Panel identified that there may be opportunities for the Council to look into charging external companies when the Authority deals with public complaints on their behalf such as V2C, Kier, Halo and Awen. Members recommend that the Member Referrals Working Group explore this further as part of the current review of the Member Referral system.

- 3.3 The Panel noted the ongoing Car Parking review. Members identified that this may present the Directorate with an opportunity to see what other Local Authorities are carrying out successfully in relation to residential and permit parking and undertake the same approach. Members also queried what the process for enforcement and if it was currently cost effective. The Panel request that this topic is added to the Scrutiny Forward Work Programme.
- 3.4 Members questioned whether the Council charge full cost for burials and note that a report is being drafted by Communities on Cemeteries and request that the report be to either Scrutiny or Audit.

4 Presentation of Budget to the Public and Budget Consultation Process

- 4.1 The Panel commend the work undertaken by Corporate Communications for their innovative way of working and raising engagement by 102% and responses to the consultation by 44%. However, the Panel were mindful of the possibility of the most vulnerable people of Bridgend and hard to reach groups may have been excluded from the consultation process.

5 Conclusion

- 5.1 To conclude the Panel recognised the importance of on-ongoing monitoring of the work carried out by BREP and the opportunity to integrate some if not all the recommendations into individual Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programmes.

Recommendation 17

Therefore the Panel recommends that the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee considers the BREP work and seeks to explore options to include some work streams into individual Forward Work Programmes. The Panel concluded by stating that they welcome development proposals from Cabinet to ensure BREP are used to their full potential.