

CABINET RESPONSE TO CORPORATE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE (COSC) REPORT ON MTFS

	BREP Recommendation	Cabinet Response
1	The Panel recommends the development of the centralisation of Business Support that would improve services, for example to other Directorates including Education and Family Support, and Social Services and Wellbeing.	Accepted. Phase 1 of Business support has now been completed and is working successfully, including the Communities Directorate and services within the Chief Executive's Directorate, including payments staff from finance. The Chief Executive will continue to explore Phase 2 of this project to include the Education and Family support and Social Services and Well-being Directorates.
2	The Panel recommends that all Directorates review their individual bespoke savings plan to support the MTFS and to present these revised plans to the BREP 2021-22.	Accepted. All savings proposals presented as part of the MTFS have more detail that is submitted to the Finance Section as part of the process. These are monitored on a monthly basis and reported to Cabinet and COSC quarterly. It is the responsibility of BREP to assist in the MTFS process, with COSC providing the scrutiny role for the in-year position. However, as new service proposals are developed, BREP could choose to review those in detail.
3	The Panel recommends that all Directorates identify all Covid-19 related costs and budgetary pressures, with clear differentiation between savings and cuts and with clear differentiation between budget pressures and the impact of Covid-19 pressures and in particular ensures there is full cost recovery, where appropriate, from WG.	Already in place. This is an on-going issue. Finance managers and accountants working with their respective Directorates have been identifying all costs and loss of income on a monthly basis since the start of the pandemic. Similarly, all loss of Council tax income and increases in CTRS, along with loss of court cost income have been monitored continually. Claims are submitted for additional costs on a monthly basis, and for loss of income on a quarterly basis. We have been successful in receiving 74% overall as part of this exercise. There are exceptions to us receiving 100% such as ICT where 50% has been granted by WG on the basis that the equipment will have a longer life.

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	BREP Recommendation	Cabinet Response
4	The Panel once again extends an invitation to Members of the CMB and Cabinet, to take a more thematic approach in tasking BREP when considering a Forward Work Programme. This is an ideal opportunity for CMB and Cabinet to identify areas of work for BREP going forward.	Partly accepted. CCMB will consider this recommendation going forward and make suggestions to BREP. However, BREP is an independent Panel that is able to decide its own FWP and the topics on which it wishes to consider in more detail and explore.
5	The Panel recommends a review of revenue costs for all new school builds, subject to the School Modernisation Programme and to establish whether there are cost savings in overall revenue costs for the new schools. The Panel also requested assurance that the School Modernisation Programme was compliant with the carbon neutral green policy adopted at Council.	Accepted. Work will be undertaken to look at the benefit realisation and lower running costs from new builds.
6	To further support schools in their management of deficit budgets and the likelihood of potential redundancies, the Panel recommends that a central redeployment register of qualified and experienced staff is set up in collaboration with the Trade Union Movement. This central register should be made available to all Senior Management Teams within schools across the county borough.	Accepted – subject to the independent status of governing bodies. Suitable alternative employment is always considered on an authority wide basis when there is a redundancy, school based or otherwise. However it is for individual schools to make staffing decisions and they cannot be compelled to take on a redundant teacher.

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7	<p>The Panel acknowledges that LAC is an annual overspend and the Directorate considers further strategic investment in prevention and early intervention programmes. Further, that the Scrutiny Committee process supports the Directorate in this initiative.</p>	<p>Accepted</p> <p>The budget for Children Looked After is 'demand led'. The Council has a strategy to meet need early, and prevent escalation of need.</p> <p>This means a strategy, and supporting business cases, is needed, which builds on work already delivered, to develop services which are focussed on supporting as many children and young people as possible to stay with family and connected person with the right care and support services.</p>

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	COSC Recommendation	Cabinet Response
1	The Committee recommended that the Cabinet lobbies Welsh Government to ensure that additional legislation comes with the consequential funding to avoid putting the Local Authority under additional unnecessary financial pressure from existing budgets. (<i>Budget Pressure CEX5 Homelessness Funding</i>).	Accepted. The Leader and the Cabinet continue to lobby and discuss additional funding for a whole range of measures including new legislation and guidance. Regular discussions take place between the Leaders of Local Authorities, the WLGA and the Ministers to ensure that Local Government receives as much funding as is possible in order to discharge both its current and new duties.
2	The Committee recommended that consideration be given to greater communication with the public explaining the costs of services and how the Council spends money.	Accepted. Communication with the public on how the Authority spends money is discharged through a whole range of channels. Information is given with the Council tax bill, the budget is published on the website and the budget consultation takes place each year. Cabinet and CMB will consider what other authorities do and options available.
3	The Committee recommended that clarification is sought regarding the Local Government Minister expressing this year's settlement is a flat cash budget that requires no redundancies.	We have received no such formal notification from WG.

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4	<p>The Committee recommended that Corporate Management Board and Cabinet are requested to review and define what the role and responsibility of BREP is and respond to Corporate Overview and Scrutiny to consider.</p>	<p>Agreed.</p> <p>The role and functions of BREP and the membership are clearly set out in the Terms of Reference for the Panel. This is agreed at the start of the meeting cycle. However, it is an opportune time to review whether these remain fit for purpose and if they enable BREP to deliver on the outcomes expected.</p> <p>Cabinet and the Corporate Management Board will assist COSC in undertaking a review of BREP.</p>
5	<p>The Committee recommended that Cabinet are requested to write to Welsh Government to impress upon them the need to lobby Westminster, as while NHS Staff and Teachers pay protections are devolved to Welsh Government, Local Government staff are on NJC Terms and Conditions, is not a devolved budget, and they will be subject to a pay freeze. Furthermore, the White Paper for the care sector requires that commissioned services should be paid a real living wage on the same terms & conditions as LA staff.</p>	<p>Agreed.</p> <p>Cabinet will continue to monitor the progress of the White paper.</p> <p>The Leader has already raised this with the WLGA and the LGA and WLGA are already lobbying on this point on behalf of all local authorities. Local Government pay increases result from negotiations with the unions and the local government employers. Negotiations are due to start imminently and will take into consideration a number of factors.</p>
6	<p>The Committee expressed concern about the Educational Psychology provision and the additional pressure the pandemic placed on the service and recommend an increase in the budget for 2021-22 to alleviate the likely huge demand from younger people from the impact of the pandemic, as well as increased additional the pandemic, as well as increased additional learning needs. (<i>Budget Reduction EFS7</i>).</p>	<p>Noted.</p> <p>Cabinet will consider as part of the MTFS process.</p>

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7	The Committee expressed concern that that the target of £300k for 2021-22 was unrealistic and recommended that it should be removed. While it supported the CAT process it was felt that any savings should be reinvested into the service. If this target cannot be removed for 2021-22, then the Committee recommend that the target of £300k be spread across 3 years from 2022-23 onwards. (<i>Budget Reduction COM1</i>).	Not agreed. The savings target is considered ambitious but will remain in place and will be delivered against asset transfers and amendments to grass cutting schedules where necessary.
8	The Committee recommended that the narrative be amended, as it states “this may impact on the availability to maintain the current number of children’s play areas”, but the Capital Programme is investing in play areas. (<i>Budget Reduction COM1</i>).	Agreed. Narrative has been amended to reflect this and the reference to maintaining children’s play areas removed.
9	The Committee recommended that CAT Transfer progress be monitored by Subject Overview and Scrutiny Committee 3 at the half year point. (<i>Budget Reduction COM1</i>).	Agreed. CAT transfer process can be added to the scrutiny Forward Work Programme.
10	The Committee recommended that the Fees and Charges policy be reviewed in 2021-22 to change it from “inflation +1%”, to just “inflation” with a view to it being implemented from the budget in 2022-23.	Agreed. The Fees and charges policy has been in place since 2016. This will be thoroughly reviewed and brought back to Cabinet to decide on any changes that are needed.
11	The Committee were concerned regarding the impact of cutting the Pest Control Contract completely, due to the impact on those in receipt of benefits and recommended that the Pest Control Savings proposal is placed on hold pending the Cabinet reviewing of the proposal. (<i>Budget Reduction CEX2</i>).	Agreed. The savings proposal for the Pest control contract will be removed from the MTF5 pending further work and a further options paper brought back to Cabinet.

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12	The Committee recommended that a working group actively look at identifying relatively small one off investments in safe routes to schools which could offset ongoing costs of some Home to School transport. (<i>Budget Pressure EFS7</i>).	Cabinet is awaiting the outcome of the Welsh Government review of learner transport. Once the outcome of the review is known, a working group will be established to review the position and way forward. If a relatively small investment in safe routes can be made then this will be progressed.
13	The Committee expressed concern about spending on consultants because of the lack of in-house capacity due to service cuts made over the last 10 years and recommended that future MTF5 budget savings proposals fully consider any possible long term implications that may incur additional cost in future years. (<i>Budget Reduction COM1</i>).	Consultants are generally appointed when specialist advice is required that is not available in house. Usually time limited and with an expected outcome. It is unrealistic to expect the Council to hold all this expertise in house and also uneconomic to do so.
14	While the Committee acknowledged that there were huge pressures upon the authority from the impact of Covid-19, there were incredible pressures within local communities and the Committee recommended that Cabinet embrace the concept of prioritisation based upon the needs of those local communities.	Cabinet wishes to thank members of COSC for their support and their recognition that the authority currently faces unprecedented pressures as a result of the pandemic. Cabinet would agree that that our focus and priorities should be on the needs of local communities, and the critical services that the Council has decided to prioritise are those which impact most on local communities, and in particular the public health consequences of the ongoing impact of COVID-19. Therefore we have had to divert resource and management emphasis to service areas including frontline social care, literally dealing with life and death issues, emergency childcare, test, trace and protect, COVID-19 enforcement and education, and the vaccination and testing programmes. Unfortunately as a result of some additional burdens, redeployment of staff, staff sickness and self-isolation, this inevitably has meant that for a short period of time other services that are 'non critical' have had to be pared back or paused, although we have committed that nothing that is time critical or crucial will be postponed or lost. It should be emphasised that, in the main, we believe that the Council has coped remarkably well throughout the pandemic and service provision has consistently proved resilient and effective,

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		<p>something all members would thank staff for and be appreciative of. Cabinet would also want to emphasise that the prioritisation of services during this difficult crisis period was something fully discussed and agreed with Cabinet and unanimously supported by all Group Leaders, based on supporting the most pressing needs of our communities and also protecting the health and wellbeing of staff.</p>
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