

# Meeting of Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee

3 July 2023

## Recommendations/Actions

### Revenue Budget Outturn 2022-23

Following detailed consideration and discussions with Officers and Cabinet Members, the Committee made the following Recommendations:

#### Council Wide

1. That all national legislative commitments and statutory services need to be fully funded by central Government and that the Committee fully support Cabinet in lobbying Westminster and Welsh Government to provide adequate funding to ensure a sustainable funding model in the future.

#### Officer's Response

The Council regularly lobbies government about fair and full funding to provide new national and statutory commitments and statutory services, usually through the auspices of the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) on a national basis. It will continue to do so both formally and informally through relevant political channels.

2. In order to manage the expectations of the public regarding future service provision, that there be a proactive corporate communications strategy setting out clearly the pressures within services, what can and cannot be achieved/maintained and what is funded by Council tax and what is funded by central UK funds through the Revenue Support Grant.

#### Officer's Response

We are currently in the process of developing a communication and engagement strategy which will set out how the Council intends involving members of the public in designing, prioritising and shaping services. The intention is that this becomes over time part of the 'way in which we work' rather than an annual event such as the budget consultation. An important part of this will be try and find a way of more members of the public better understanding the challenges and choices that the Council faces with the increasing pressures on services and the projected difficult budget settlements over the coming years. Just for clarity, that other than those services funded by specific grants it is not possible to say what is Council Tax funded and what is WG funded via the RSG.

3. That consideration be given to how the information in Recommendation 2, above, be effectively communicated to the public, including consideration of putting the information on the Council website and in a newsletter accompanying Council Tax Demand letters.

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### Officer's Response

As above, use of the Council website could be used as part of this strategy if that is deemed an effective method of engagement and communication. There are limitations on what can be included in the Council Tax demand letter but this too will be considered as part of the strategy.

### **Recruitment:**

The Committee expressed concern regarding the Council-wide issue of recruitment and retention and acknowledged that whilst Directorates were working on this in isolation, felt that it required a corporate approach focussing on the 7 Principles contained in the Corporate Plan.

The Committee therefore Recommended:

4. That an overarching workforce plan is needed to address the reasons for the Council not being commercially competitive and its inability to successfully recruit and retain staff.

### Officer's Response

As set out in the meeting in some detail, Directorates are not working in isolation to address some of the workforce challenges around recruitment and retention. There is a Corporate approach and a Strategic Workforce Plan has recently been drafted and will be shared with members in the next couple of months.

5. That consideration be given to more integrated working between Human Resources and Directorates to avoid Directorates trying to address the issue of recruitment in isolation/in silos and to holistically strengthen the HR functions and achieve the objectives of the overarching Corporate Plan.

### Officer's Response

As above Directorates are not seeking to address workforce challenges in silos or in isolation. HR support and the dedicated business partner model ensures effective integrated working between Directorates and the corporate centre. Both Directorates and HR have clear roles and responsibilities around recruitment and retention and both need to work effectively to achieve success. The HR function has been subject to very significant budget cuts over the period of austerity in the last decade. Strengthening the function as suggested, while of course welcome, would require additional investment which would need to be considered against other growth demands across the Council as part of the budget process.

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6. That the Council work with schools to inform students, before they choose their GCSE and A Level options, regarding the career prospects of working for the Local Authority, across a wide range of professions and specialisms and likewise work with Welsh-medium schools, given the shortage of Welsh speaking staff in the Authority. It was also recommended that the Council establish links with universities in order to secure graduate employees and to drive forward recruitment for the Authority.

#### Officer's Response

There is already significant work with Bridgend College, local Universities and many schools around career opportunities in the Council. However, this will be reviewed and enhanced if possible, in particular the suggestion about working more closely with our Welsh medium secondary school will be explored.

7. That there should be an agreed National level of salaries and terms and conditions for all positions in local government in order to ensure that the Council has an equal footing in terms of competitiveness with other local authorities and the private sector.

#### Officer's Response

Local Government terms and conditions are generally already consistent across Councils. There are however some local differences in grades based on the respective job evaluation schemes and pay and grading structures in each Council. What would be helpful in some jobs where there is greater demand and a limit in market supply, for example social workers, is if there were national pay grades that applied across all Councils. This case has been made consistently to Welsh Government with regard to social care to end the counter-productive competition based on pay between local authorities which results in 'poaching' of staff based on paying higher salaries.

8. That a review be undertaken regarding the need to advertise in national newspapers for jobs over a certain grade and whether these roles would attract more applicants if alternative and, possibly more local, advertising was pursued.

#### Officer's Response

We regularly review and monitor the effectiveness and success of advertising jobs in various publications. We are moving increasingly to a 'horses for courses' type approach on the basis of 'what works best', that allows bespoke campaigns to be devised using both local, national and specialist publications

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and websites dependent on the job. Of course, we do need to ensure value for money as advertising in some publications is very expensive. The consistent factor is that all Council jobs are also advertised on the Council's job web page.

9. The Committee expressed concern regarding the loss of successful candidates due to the delay in obtaining a Disclosure and Barring Service check and queried the reason for the delay and whether there was anything that could be done to reduce the waiting time to stop candidates finding work elsewhere.

### Officer's Response

A DBS check is an essential part of the recruitment process. We are aware that there have been some delays with the DBS service concluding their checks and as such we begin the DBS checks at the earliest stage during the onboarding of new employees.

## EFS

Following detailed consideration and discussions with Officers and Cabinet Members, the Committee made the following Recommendations:

10. That the Committee write to the Welsh Government expressing their concerns that any further cuts to the education budget would be unacceptable, given the 2% efficiency saving in 2023-24 and further annual 1% reductions predicted for forthcoming years. (**Chair/Scrutiny**)

### Complete

Copy Letter Sent – Attached as Appendix A.



Letter to Minister  
for Education and W

Copy Letter Received – Attached as Appendix B



Attachment B -  
Letter from Minister

11. The Committee acknowledged the difficulties of recruitment within catering services and the impact on the provision of breakfast clubs and requested an

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update on what was being done to ensure that vulnerable children were receiving breakfast before school.

#### Officer's Response

The local authority regularly attempts to recruit staff to supervise breakfast clubs. However, since the pandemic, it has been extremely challenging to recruit staff especially in three schools below:

- Coety Primary School
- Brackla Primary School
- Trelales Primary School

The socio-economic impact of the pandemic has appeared to have had a negative impact on the attractiveness of the breakfast club roles, especially in some parts of Bridgend and therefore, these three breakfasts 'clubs' remain closed.

Staffing is reviewed at the start of every term by the local authority in liaison with headteachers, in particular, in respect of supervision levels at individual schools and officers continue to work extremely hard to recruit to these important roles. For example, after seven recruitment attempts at Coety Primary School, there remains an insufficient staffing level required under legislation to reopen the free breakfast provision.

The Committee requested:

12. An update on when the Welsh Government review regarding home to school transport would realistically be published, given that no changes would be considered until the conclusion of the review.

#### Officer's Response

The local authority is unaware of Welsh Government's formal timetable for the publication of the review.

### Communities

Following detailed consideration and discussions with Officers and Cabinet Members, the Committee made the following Recommendation:

13. That consideration be given to there being a dedicated resource to support the Communities Directorate in processing and responding to Member Referrals and that consideration be given to ways in which to make the

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Member's Portal more effective and efficient in keeping Members updated with the status of referrals.

#### Officer's Response

Work has been undertaken in the past 6 months, in consultation with the Democratic Services Committee, to improve and develop the Members Portal. This includes identifying the reporting needs of members and this is now on the work schedule. We are already seeking to provide additional targeted support to Communities through business support.

### Corporate Plan Delivery Plan 2023-24 and Draft Performance Framework

Following detailed consideration and discussions with Officers and Cabinet Members, the Committee made the following Recommendations:

14. That consideration be given to how the roles as set out in the 'I am a ...' section of the draft Performance Framework may be effectively cascaded and communicated to all staff and the public.

#### Officer's Response

Communication and cascade is underway and will include:

- Inclusion in the staff and manager induction (elearning and in person)
- An all staff session in September
- A Bridgend article (by a graduate) in August
- Training for all performance staff
- Cascade by DMTs and inclusion in appraisals

15. That future reports regarding performance be developed to include a holistic overview in the form of an executive summary to succinctly summarise performance as measured against the Corporate Plan. The Committee expressed concern regarding Officer time and effort required to present complex data and welcomed concise and proportionate information which could be more sustainable and influential.

#### Officer's Response

This will form part of system development over the summer and development of dashboards in the autumn.