

Meeting of Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee

30 January 2024

Recommendations / Information Requested

	Recommendations / Information Requested:	Response:
Medium Term Financial Strategy 2024-25 to 2027-28 and Draft Budget Consultation Process		
<p>The Committee submitted the Recommendations in Appendices A and B to Cabinet on 6 February 2024 as part of the budget consultation process, subject to additions and amendments made by COSC at this meeting.</p> <p>Response from Cabinet provided in Appendix A of the Cabinet MTFs report on 20 Feb 24.</p> <p>The Committee endorsed the Recommendations of Overview and Scrutiny Committees and agreed to write to the Welsh Minister for Finance and Local Government regarding the budget and funding concerns expressed. The letter is attached for Members' information.</p>		
<u>Recommendation:</u>		
1	Following discussion around the impact of budget reductions and reduced resources, including that available to Members, the Committee requested that the Democratic Services Committee consider the changes being proposed for support services to Members and Committees, such as more remote meetings, the number of meetings as well as general resources provided to Members, to potentially assist in making these efficiencies for the future and reducing pressure on staff, particularly in relation to the running of meetings.	Given the budget reductions and reduced resources predicted for the DS team, consideration will be given to reducing some meetings in the annual calendar of meetings as well as looking at how future meetings should be held; remotely or hybrid; based on evidence of member attendance and the future staffing resources available to support them. This information will be considered at the AGM of Council in May 2024, however a report will also be taken to a future meeting of the DSC to consider the full implications of the reductions and the support provided to Members.

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2	The Committee requested that clarification be sought as to what the 500k identified under budget pressure EFS4 will cover as there were varying figures provided in relation to this.	The growth proposed in EFS4 relates to edge of care services, a need identified in an external review undertaken to inform the sustainable service proposed for Children's Services and agreed by Council in September 2023.
Budget Monitoring 2023-24 – Quarter 3 Revenue Forecast		
	<u>Recommendations:</u>	
3	It was agreed that clarification on the figures for the number of care experienced children in out of county placements as well as those in other provision such as Heronsbridge would be provided in any future reporting to Scrutiny, including in budget reports.	Noted. This information will be included in future reports.
4	Members queried the underspend in the Council tax reduction scheme in that this underspend had risen since last year and expressed concern that the process and criteria had potentially become too rigid. Providing personal examples of where this might be the case from residents within the borough, Members recommended that the application process be reviewed to determine whether the process had in fact become too rigid, preventing some people, who should be eligible given their personal circumstances, from accessing this funding.	The Council Tax Reduction (CTR) Scheme is approved annually by the Council and has largely remained unchanged since inception in 2013. In order to receive CTR, people have to apply for the discount and provide evidence of their household's income, capital and savings. People can apply by completing a paper form (which can be sent to Civic Offices or dropped off at any of the Council's Information Points), on-line through MyAccount and also just by expressing an interest to claim CTR when they apply for Universal Credit. There are numerous

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		<p>ways of submitting evidence of income etc.: by post, uploading documents via MyAccount, through the information points, and by email. Where someone needs additional support to claim, the Service can complete a form with the customer at Civic Offices, and a visiting officer is available to support the most vulnerable people to claim at home.</p> <p>The CTR budget was increased by £500k in 2022/23. However, CTR expenditure across Wales reduced in that year by 0.1% (source WG). The majority of local authorities saw a decrease in the value of reductions provided in 2022/23, but for the Councils that had increased expenditure, they also had comparatively higher increases in their Council Tax charge. Bridgend did not increase Council Tax charges in 2022/23.</p>
<u>Information Requested:</u>		
5	The Committee requested the following information as a result of their discussions surrounding the 2023/24 budget:	
	a) The figure for the Council's Contingency Reserve.	There is £906,000 in the Council's Contingency Reserve.
	b) Clarification on how many Out of Authority children are attending Heronsbridge and Ysgol Bryn Castell Schools and how much the Authority receives for these placements compared to the cost of sending	3 Children living outside Bridgend County Borough are currently attending Heronsbridge School.

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	<p>our own children out of county where there are no spaces in county. (LH)</p>	<p>The cost of a place at Heronsbridge School varies, depending on the band of learning difficulty and whether the place is day or residential, and standard or enhanced.</p> <p>For 2023-2024, the place funding for a Bridgend pupil at Heronsbridge School varies between £8,561 and £81,987.</p> <p>No pupils, who live in Bridgend, are unable to secure a place at Heronsbridge School and are educated outside Bridgend County.</p> <p>The average cost of an out-of-county pupil place at a specialist education setting for pupils living in Bridgend County is £38,691.</p>
	<p>c) Clarification over the overspend within Fleet services and reassurance that any costs relating to third parties such as South Wales Police are fully recovered.</p>	<p>The overspend position in Fleet services is the result of a large number of vacancies in the BCBC workforce (mechanical fitter positions). There are 7 positions in the depot, however 5 are currently vacant, despite a number of recruitment attempts. Therefore, we are unable to recharge and cover the cost of maintaining BCBC vehicles. This work is now being undertaken by SWP staff in this joint maintenance facility. A review of the joint depot operation at Ty Thomas is now being undertaken to understand what the options are moving forward for the maintenance of the Councils corporate fleet. This outcome of this review can be reported back to Scrutiny later this year.</p>

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		<p>The dept operates on a cost recharge basis, so that any work undertaken for SWP would be fully recovered by BCBC.</p>
<p>Corporate Plan/Delivery Plan Review for 2024/25</p>		
<p><u>Recommendations:</u></p>		
<p align="center">6</p>	<p>Members referred to the Councillor Portal for Member Referrals and requested that as Councillors are service users in this process, as they raise referrals from residents, a set of PIs to consider timely responses to these via the portal be incorporated. Members also urged the Chief Executive to look at the use of an analytical tool to provide this within the resources available.</p>	<p>Councillors where possible should signpost the resident to raise a “report it” as a resident, however where this is not possible then seek support from a member via the referral system. Currently Partnerships are reviewing the options with regards the analysis of referrals, this will involve budgetary investment which CMB will need to sign off following an exploratory investigation and presentation.</p>
<p align="center">7</p>	<p>The Committee agreed that there were definite priority PIs that needed to be retained in the delivery plan, such as those associated with Schools, Social Services and Wellbeing as well as any associated with Homelessness. However, Members proposed that the PIs and points previously suggested by Scrutiny Committees remain for now and be revisited in March 2024 to consider the full implications of the budget reductions and resulting resources available.</p>	<p>This has been added to the COSC agenda for the March meeting.</p>

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<u>Information Requested:</u>		
8	The Committee referred to the Communication Peer Review undertaken in 2023 and requested that they receive a copy of this report.	The Communications Peer Review was carried out on the basis that it was an internal document, not for publication, the participants supported and took part in the review in an open and honest way with that undertaking. It is not appropriate therefore to share the whole document publicly, however, the document has been shared with Group Leaders on the basis that relevant information can then be shared with their group members on a 'need to know' basis if necessary.
Capital Strategy 2024-25		
<u>Recommendations:</u>		
9	Members expressed concern regarding the unknown implications and risks associated with Bridgend Market including the potential financial implications for the Authority. The Committee asked that this be reflected somewhere in the Strategy to highlight the future potential schemes and costs this may result in.	The capital strategy includes a section on the management of risks for all schemes. With regards to the market specifically we are awaiting the outcome of the detailed surveys to understand what the potential costs could be and whether remedial works required would be of a capital or revenue nature.

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10	The Committee highlighted the need to be realistic in relation to what can be achieved by the Authority, expressing concern over the potential future revenue implications of the Capital Strategy. Whilst recognising that revenue implications form part of the decision-making process, the Committee supported the proposal by the Leader to strengthen this point within the Strategy.	This has been strengthened within the strategy, and specifically included in Principle 3: “Ensure that the ongoing revenue implications of any capital scheme are fully identified, and funding has been identified to cover these costs”.
11	Following discussion around the Council’s assets and the need to review and dispose of them where possible in order to release some income, the Committee recommended that consideration be given to whether Porthcawl Harbour could be such an asset that could be run just as well privately.	<p>The facilities for berthholders at the Porthcawl Harbour have significantly improved as a result of the development of the Cosy Corner Building and investment in the Harbour itself. Mooring fees are proposed to rise in April 2024 as a result of this and will cover the costs of the operation of the Harbour Facility.</p> <p>Noted – if considered appropriate, a report could come forward outlining options for running the Harbour in the future, taking account of all maritime safety legislation and statutory requirements (JN)</p>
12	In relation to the Capital Programme Board, the Committee recommended that a review process of the Board be undertaken and included within the Strategy, to make sure that it is fulfilling its Terms of Reference and to consider aspects such as frequency of meetings, membership and whether there are areas that the Board should be considering given the challenges facing the Authority.	<p>The Capital Programme Board has now been established for 6 months. The Terms of Reference for the Board were agreed at the first meeting but it was agreed they would be subject to review.</p> <p>These comments will be taken into account when the Terms of Reference are reviewed.</p>
13	Whilst appreciating that there might be grant funding available to buy-in expertise required to manage Capital projects, Members expressed concern around the possibility that current staff resources could be moved to meet	Noted.

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	<p>the needs of the numerous Capital projects, thereby taking away from the day to day, business as usual, of the Council. There was further apprehension over this given the issues the Authority has already experienced in attracting qualified professionals into such project management positions. It was proposed that this be monitored closely including by Scrutiny during future consideration of the Capital Programme.</p>	
<p><u>Information Requested:</u></p>		
14	<p>The Committee requested clarification on when the investment period for the Council's Investment properties, quoted at a value of £5.845 million in the report, actually started and also whether there are any CIPFA returns relating to this investment.</p>	<p>This information was sent to Members on 14 March 2024.</p>
15	<p>In relation to the Mutual Investment model for the development of schools, the Committee requested that clarification be provided, when available, as to the actual level of revenue costs the Authority will have to contribute on an annual basis over the 25-year contract period.</p>	<p>The Annual Service Charge (ASC) commences at the point of 'Operational Commencement' (when the school is open with children in). Once the ASC is determined, WG will contribute 81% of the annual cost and BCBC 19%. WEPCo has provided an indication that Bridgend's annual contribution could be in the region of £1 million, over a period of 25 years, but the final costs will not be known until towards financial close.</p>