

CORPORATE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - TUESDAY, 28 JANUARY 2025

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE CORPORATE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD HYBRID IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER - CIVIC OFFICES, ANGEL STREET, BRIDGEND, CF31 4WB ON TUESDAY, 28 JANUARY 2025 AT 10:00

Present

Councillor F D Bletsoe – Chairperson

JPD Blundell

RM Granville

GH Haines

Present Virtually

HJ David
A Ulberini-Williams

S J Griffiths
AJ Williams

M L Hughes

T Thomas

Apologies for Absence

RL Penhale-Thomas and E D Winstanley

Invitees

Councillor John Spanswick
Councillor Jane Gebbie
Councillor Hywel Williams
Councillor Martyn Jones
Councillor Paul Davies
Councillor Eugene Caparros
Councillor Melanie Evans
Councillor Neelo Farr

Leader
Deputy Leader / Cabinet Member Social Services, Health and Wellbeing
Cabinet Member for Finance and Performance
Cabinet Member for Education and Youth Services
Cabinet Member for Climate Change and the Environment
Cabinet Member for Resources (Job Share)
Cabinet Member for Resources (Job Share)
Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Economic Development and Housing

Mark Shepherd
Carys Lord
Lindsay Harvey
Claire Marchant
Janine Nightingale
Kelly Watson

Chief Executive
Chief Officer – Finance, Housing and Change
Corporate Director – Education, Early Years and Young People
Corporate Director – Social Services and Wellbeing
Corporate Director - Communities
Chief Officer - Legal & Regulatory Services, HR & Corporate Policy

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Deborah Exton
Martin Morgans
Nigel Smith

Deputy Head of Finance
Head of Partnerships and Housing
Group Manager – Chief Accountant

Officers:

Meryl Lawrence
Jessica McLellan

Senior Democratic Services Officer - Scrutiny
Scrutiny Officer

Declarations of Interest

Councillor Amanda Williams - Personal – Item 3 - Local Education Authority Governor at Brynteg Comprehensive School and Community Council Governor at Coety Primary School.

Councillor Alex Ulberini-Williams - Personal – Item 3 - Husband works as a music teacher in another local authority.

Councillor Tim Thomas - Personal - Item 3 - In work capacity, has liaised with the Cabinet Secretary and the Welsh Government regarding increasing supply of housing and reducing homelessness and wife works as a maths and music teacher in another local authority.

Councillor Martin Hughes - Personal - Item 3 - Daughter is head of music in a neighbouring local authority and wife is a private music tutor, both of whom have benefited from the music service in the past.

144. Medium Term Financial Strategy 2025-26 to 2028-29 and Draft Budget Consultation Process

Decision Made	<u>RESOLVED:</u> Following detailed consideration of the report and its appendices with Cabinet Members and Officers, the Committee agreed to submit the Recommendations in Appendices A and B to Cabinet on 4 February 2025 as part of the budget consultation process, subject to the following additions and amendments: Recommendations 1. <u>Bridgend Music Service</u> The Committee discussed the overwhelming number of representations they had each received from headteachers, parents and learners regarding the powerful impact the Bridgend Music Service has had on the lives and wellbeing of all who use it and also highlighted its importance for those learners who find academia or sport difficult. The Committee strongly recommended that Bridgend Music Service be retained as a fully
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	subsidised service. However, whilst recognising that it was a significant budget pressure, the Committee considered that the value provided by the Service was such that they recommended that the budget reduction proposal EEYYP 12, at least, be deferred pending exploration of all possible alternative delivery models to ensure that the Service can continue long term. The Committee further recommended that any alternative delivery model, whether or not involving other stakeholders or parental contribution models, should maintain the free provision of the Service, at the very least, for learners from low income families. 2. <u>Counselling Services</u> In addition to the comments made by SOSC 1 regarding Budget Reduction Proposal EEYYP 3: <i>that opportunities be explored further to find alternative delivery models such as not-for-profit or commercial partnerships, in order to continue providing these important services</i>, COSC stressed the importance of working with partners and recommended that the Authority work closely with Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Board in providing support for the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people across the county borough. 3. <u>EEYYP and Schools Budget Pressures</u> Further to SOSC 1's support for the budget pressure proposals, the Committee specifically wished to support the budget growth for Additional Learning Needs (ALN). However, the Committee recommended that the budget growth proposal of providing additional support for those with ALN needed to be carefully balanced with the demand and impact that the budget reductions proposals regarding ALN would have on staffing and support for learners. 4. <u>School Delegated Budgets – SCH 1</u> The Members discussed representations received from headteachers regarding the detrimental impact that the further 1% cut would have on their ability to deliver a wide range of service and on their already significant deficit budgets including the significant impact on staffing and their wellbeing, potentially larger class sizes, the narrowing of the curriculum and potential impact on additional provisions such as, extracurricular activities. Therefore, the Committee recommended that SOSC 1's recommendation <i>that the Cabinet are asked to do all they can to remove the 1% budget saving proposed for schools</i> be wholly endorsed by COSC, and that Cabinet reconsider this
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	significant proposed budget reduction for the reasons above. 5. <u>Grant funding</u> The Committee requested a breakdown of value of the grant funding which the Council could expect to receive from the UK and Welsh Government in 2025/26 including the expected timeline for receipt and whether this represented an increase or decrease from previous years. The Committee were advised that although some headline figures had been received on an all-Wales basis, it was, as yet, unknown what Bridgend's allocation from these would be. The Committee recommended that should this information be available prior to the setting of the budget, that Cabinet consider it as part of the full financial outline during the budget setting process. Additional Information 6. The Committee expressed concern regarding the perceived discrepancy between the Welsh Government promoting a 4% investment in education and Bridgend proposing a 1% cut to school budgets. The Committee were advised that Bridgend's allocation from the additional Welsh Government funding for education in Wales equated to around £10.8m. The Committee requested a copy of the letter from the Cabinet Secretary for Education detailing the breakdown of this allocation referred to by the Corporate Director – Education, Early Years and Young People. 7. The Committee expressed concern regarding the impact of falling pupil roll numbers on funding for schools and requested the pupil numbers on roll for past years and a projection of future numbers including the Pupil Admission Number (PAN) for each school. 8. The Committee requested a written response providing an estimated value of the revenue lost, at the Rhiw Car Park, as a result of the car park barrier remaining up all day. 9. The Committee were advised that the Council's charging regime for car parking, including the free parking offers, were being reviewed. The Committee requested that the Subject Overview and Scrutiny Committee 3 consider requesting a report detailing the outcome of the exercise referred to above and that such report demonstrates the difference in revenue between the free parking period and a full charging model.
Date Decision Made	28 January 2025

145. Budget Monitoring 2024-25 - Quarter 3 Revenue Forecast

Decision Made	<u>RESOLVED:</u> Following consideration of the report and detailed discussion with Cabinet Members and Senior Officers, the Committee made the following recommendations and requests for additional information: Recommendations 10. Whilst discussing significant overspends in some services, the Committee expressed concern that the Council's projected overall underspend position masks significant overspends in some areas and recommended that the Authority should continue the push to try to reduce and address these overspends. 11. The Committee expressed concern that the White Paper from Welsh Government regarding home to school transport is still awaited and the impact being a significant recurring overspend on service provision. The Committee recommended that transformation of the service was required and that there needed to be work and education around the public bus network. The Committee also expressed concern, that a Welsh Government review of bus network services and franchising will commence in North Wales so that a review of Bridgend is not scheduled for at least two years. Additional Information 12. The Committee expressed concern regarding the significant increase in demand for learners with additional learning needs (ALN) driving the overspend position in this area and queried whether the reasons for the increase in demand and the projected likely demand for ALN services were sufficiently understood. The Committee requested a copy of the Estyn review report referred to by the Corporate Director – Education, Early Years and Young People regarding the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018 which considered some areas of learning needs and support required for learners and which provided a helpful summary of themes from a number of schools across Wales. 13. The Committee discussed legacy issues from the pandemic impacting on pupil behaviour leading to an increase in exclusions and the significant increase in demand for ALN provision, expressed concern that the increase in demand may not be solely due to pandemic and asked whether further
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	work was necessary to fully understand all of the reasons driving the increase in demand and overspend in ALN services. The Committee were advised that educational specialists in Welsh Government were undertaking a detailed piece of work looking at the reasons for the additional demand and requested that the Subject Overview and Scrutiny Committee 1 consider requesting a report detailing the outcome of the exercise referred to above, when available, or to include it in the report on Behaviour scheduled to that Committee, as appropriate.
Date Decision Made	28 January 2025

146. Capital Strategy 2025-26

Decision Made	<u>RESOLVED:</u> Following consideration of the report and discussion with Cabinet Members and Senior Officers the Committee noted the draft Capital Strategy 2025-26 to 2034-35, including the Prudential Indicators 2025-26 to 2034-35 at Appendix A.
Date Decision Made	28 January 2025

147. Urgent Items

Decision Made	None.
Date Decision Made	28 January 2025

To observe further debate that took place on the above items, please click this [link](#)

The meeting closed at 13:26.

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