

SUBJECT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 1 - THURSDAY, 16 JANUARY 2025

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE SUBJECT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 1 HELD HYBRID IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER - CIVIC OFFICES, ANGEL STREET, BRIDGEND, CF31 4WB ON THURSDAY, 16 JANUARY 2025 AT 11:00

Present

Councillor A Ulberini-Williams – Chairperson

HJ David

D M Hughes

E D Winstanley

Present Virtually

JPD Blundell
AJ Williams

RJ Collins

I M Spiller

T Thomas

Apologies for Absence

H Griffiths and J Llewellyn-Hopkins

Invitees / Registered Representatives

Councillor John Spanswick
Councillor Jane Gebbie
Councillor Hywel Williams
Councillor Martyn Jones

Leader
Deputy Leader / Cabinet Member Social Services, Health and Wellbeing
Cabinet Member for Finance and Performance
Cabinet Member for Education and Youth Services

Carys Lord
Lindsay Harvey

Chief Officer – Finance, Housing and Change
Corporate Director – Education, Early Years & Young People

Deborah Exton
Victoria Adams
Adele Ahearn
Judith Tutssel

Deputy Head of Finance
Finance Manager – Communities, Education, Early Years and Young People
Accountant – Education, Early Years and Young people
Local Management of Schools Officer

Angela Clarke

Registered Representative – Church in Wales

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Headteachers

Jonathan Lewis
Ravi Pawar

Vice Chair of Schools Budget Forum
Chair of Bridgend Association of Secondary Headteachers

Officers:

Rachel Keepins
Lucy Beard

Democratic Services Manager
Scrutiny Officer

Declarations of Interest

Councillor Amanda Williams – Personal Interest – Chair of Governors at Coety Primary School and Vice Chair of Governors at Brynteg Comprehensive School.

Councillor Elaine Winstanley – Personal Interest – Item 4 – Employee of Awen Cultural Trust

Councillor Alex Ulberini-Williams – Personal Interest – Item 4 (Budget Reduction Proposals) - Husband is a Music Teacher in another local authority

62. Approval of Minutes

Decision Made	<u>RESOLVED:</u> That the minutes of the meeting of the Subject Overview and Scrutiny Committee 1 dated 18 November 2024 be approved as a true and accurate record.
Date Decision Made	16 January 2025

63. Medium Term Financial Strategy 2025-26 to 2028-29

Decision Made	<u>RESOLVED:</u> Following detailed consideration and discussions with Cabinet Members and Senior Officers, the Committee made the following recommendations and requests for additional information:
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	<p>Recommendations:</p> <p>1. Members discussed in depth the efficiency savings against School Delegated Budgets – 1% for 2025-26 and 1% thereafter.</p> <p>Members expressed concern over School Deficit budgets in that between 50% and 75% of schools are reporting deficit budgets for 2024-25 and this will only be further exacerbated by further budget reductions. Some schools were even reporting in their recovery plans that were simply not going to recover, meaning the Local Authority (LA), after 5 years, would have to cover the deficit.</p> <p>Members also expressed concern over the fact that this reduction went against the Council's own priority to protect vulnerable children and young people and could result in cuts to key supportive services to these individuals.</p> <p>Members noted that whilst Welsh Government funding would be provided for pay and price increases this year, this was one-off funding that could not be guaranteed for next year and would not resolve the ongoing deficit budget issue for schools. Linked to this and for the future, just as areas such as homelessness is being considered for growth proposals due to reductions in Welsh Government grant funding, so should schools and education be considered for potential growth and solutions to replace and help mitigate against their reductions in Welsh Government grant funding in various areas. Alternatively, the Local Authority needed to push back with Welsh Government in relation to the pressure on local authorities to administer new schemes and implement new legislation without the continued supporting funding behind it.</p> <p>Based on their concerns, the Committee were in consensus and strongly recommended that Cabinet are asked to do all they can to remove the 1% budget saving proposed for schools.</p> <p>2. Members discussed in detail the importance to maintain both the Counselling and Bridgend Music Service.</p> <p>Members highlighted that both services were vital in supporting pupils who experience mental health issues, as whilst this was obvious with Counselling services, evidence was heard about how Music services also helps children and young people who have difficulties with their mental health. Members therefore pointed out that these proposals to reduce or remove these services was against the LA's priority to protect vulnerable individuals.</p>
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	<p>It was further highlighted by both Headteachers and Members, that Music provision now formed a significant part of the new curriculum and provided valuable enrichment to pupils.</p> <p>Concerns were raised that schools might not be able to afford to fund Counselling or Music services going forward and provide valuable opportunities to their pupils.</p> <p>The Committee recommended 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.</p> <p>3. Members asked for clarification on whether the underspend now projected for 2024 as reported under Q3 meant there was any capacity to reduce any proposed budget cuts. If this was the case the Committee recommended that School Delegated Budgets, Music Services and Counselling Services be prioritised for reduction in saving, if not full removal of saving if possible, in the proposed budget for 2025-26.</p> <p>4. Subject to the Directorate response to the Committee on Base Budget Pressures above, Members wished to support the budget pressure proposals</p> <p>Additional information:</p> <p>Following detailed consideration and discussion with the Cabinet Member, Officers and Invitees, the Committee made the following requests for information:</p> <p>5. Members requested more information on what other local authorities were doing to set a balanced budget which Officers advised once they had the wider Wales view they would be content to share with the Committee.</p> <p>6. Members discussed the implications of Legal Services for schools expressing their concerns with more complex casework involving behaviour, attendance, health, and safety legislation. Headteachers advised they have external arrangements with legal services who are knowledgeable and are able to turn things around in a timely manner to support schools. Headteachers stated that the conflict came where the Local Authorities' legal team may not agree with the external legal advice which could be a challenge for the schools. The Committee requested that this is investigated further as to whether the external legal support was sustainable, manageable, affordable and whether the support was sufficient for today's demands on schools.</p>
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SUBJECT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 1 - THURSDAY, 16 JANUARY 2025

	7. More information with regards to the Welsh Governments revenue support grant and other grants that might be forthcoming.
Date Decision Made	16 January 2025

64. Draft Terms of Reference for School Improvement Research Evaluation Panel

Decision Made	<p>The Scrutiny Officer presented the report, the purpose of which was to present the Committee with the Draft Terms of Reference for School Improvement Research Evaluation Panel.</p> <p><u>RESOLVED:</u> Following detailed consideration and discussions, the Committee made the following proposals and comments:</p> <p>8. Members felt consistency was valuable within the Panels and proposed the Chair of SOSC 1 should be present at all Panel meetings.</p> <p>9. Members felt it was important to try and eliminate the risk of there being empty spaces, due to Members potentially not being able to make a Panel. They agreed with the rota basis so everything was fair but proposed a backup plan be available should a Member not be able to attend in case of an emergency or holidays for example.</p> <p>10. Members suggested the Committee liaise with members and Officers of the School Improvement Group (SIG) to ensure alignment and coordination between the SOSC 1 Panel and SIG to minimise duplication and use School and Officer time wisely.</p> <p>11. Members requested that Additional Learning Needs and Behaviour and Exclusions be prioritised in the list of items for consideration.</p>
Date Decision Made	16 January 2025

65. Forward Work Programme Update

Decision Made	<p><u>RESOLVED:</u></p> <p>That the Committee approved the Forward Work Programme (FWP) in Appendix A subject to the inclusion of the recommendations below, noted the Recommendations Monitoring Action Sheet in Appendix B and noted that the FWP as approved by the Committee would be reported to the next meeting of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee:</p> <p>The Committee requested the following be included in the FWP:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. With the Committee unable to have the Future School Improvement Arrangements scheduled for the next March meeting of SOSC 1 due to the item going to Cabinet on 4th February it was suggested this item be rescheduled for a year's time to see how it has been embedded into the system.2. Members wished for it to be brought to the next SOSC 1 FWP planning meeting that Behaviour, Exclusions and Attendance be brought forward to the March meeting.
Date Decision Made	16 January 2025

66. Urgent Items

Decision Made	None
Date Decision Made	16 January 2025

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

The meeting closed at 3:14pm.

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