

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, ANGEL STREET, BRIDGEND ON WEDNESDAY, 17 DECEMBER 2014 AT 2.00 PM

Present:

Councillor EP Foley - Chairperson

DK Edwards	CA Green	M Jones	RL Thomas
C Westwood	DBF White	RE Young	

Registered Representatives & Co-opted Members:

Mr R Thomas (Primary School Parent Governor)  
Mr T Cahalane (Roman Catholic Church)  
Reverend Canon E J Evans (Church in Wales)

Officers:

R Keepins	-	Scrutiny Officer
J Monks	-	Democratic Services Officer - Committees

Invitees:

Councillor H J David	-	Cabinet Member - Children and Young People
D McMillan	-	Corporate Director - Children
C Turner	-	Head of Safeguarding and Family Support
N Echanis	-	Head of Strategy, Commissioning and Partnerships
A Norman	-	Finance Manager – Children’s Services
H Castle	-	School Budget Forum Representative

147 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from the following Members:

Councillor P A Davies	-	Unwell
Councillor D M Hughes	-	Work Commitments
Councillor P N John	-	Personal
Councillor G Phillips	-	Unwell
Mr W Bond	-	Unwell

148 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor White declared a personal interest under Item 3 regarding Western Bay, as he is employed by Swansea Council and also his cousin’s wife works for the Music Service.

149 DRAFT BUDGET CONSULTATION PROCESS

The Scrutiny Officer presented a report the purpose of which was to provide Members with a copy of the draft Cabinet Budget proposals for 2015-16, together with the background information as to the consultative role of Overview and Scrutiny Committees and the work of the Standing Budget Research and Evaluation Panel in respect of the budget setting process. The report also informed Members of the results of the public consultation process in relation to the draft budget proposals.

The Chairperson, on behalf of the Committee, welcomed to the meeting the Headteacher of Cynffig Comprehensive School, representing the School Budget Forum.

Discussion ensued and the Committee questioned the fact that the impact column contained no element of analysis as to what the impact was likely to be as a result of the proposed budget saving.

The Corporate Director – Children reassured Members that each project contained a proposal plan which detailed how the savings would be undertaken, together with a full risk assessment, and this was overseen by the Children’s Change Programme Board, chaired by the Corporate Director- Children, and this fed into PMB chaired by the Chief Executive.

The Committee asked whether there would be any manpower implications as a result of savings being made to nursery provision.

The Cabinet Member – Children and Young People advised that no decision had been made regarding moving nursery provision from full time to part time as this was still under consideration.

The Committee commented that this seemed to be a reversal of a decision previously made by the Cabinet, which had appeared at the time to be a reasonable compromise, and asked why it had changed.

The Cabinet Member – Children and Young People explained that there were a number of proposals put forward for the MTFs for 2017/18 and this particular issue would need to be revisited by Cabinet, as well as undertaking a consultation process before any final decision was made.

The Committee asked for an update on the Placement and Permanence Strategy.

The Corporate Director – Children advised that the entire transformation of the Children’s Service focussed on meeting the needs of the children and young people early, and therefore the Early Intervention Strategy, together with the Placement and Permanence Strategy allows those needs to be met, with more concentration on early action. She explained that this was part of the process for reducing the number of Looked After Children (LAC) through early intervention before those children reached the stage of entering the system.

The Head of Safeguarding and Family Support advised that it was a constant challenge as there would always be some children who would need safety and protection. He reported that during the last six weeks, 18 children had acquired permanent placements, and as there were a significant number of babies coming into the system it was important to act swiftly on many occasions. This financial year a record number of 23 children had been placed for adoption and by the end of the financial year they would have exceeded their target by eight children, with the average cost of an adoption placement amounting to £27k. He explained that it was not always in a child’s best interest to be placed within the Borough, and on those occasions such placements are sold onto an alternative local authority. He advised that the Adoption Service was moving towards a regional rather than national service with the Authority linking with Neath Port Talbot (NPT) Council, which was due to go live in 2015. This move would give more focus on being able to increase the number of adopters with the opportunity to then place children in NPT locations. In terms of monitoring and measuring, he reported that ambitious targets were set in January 2014 with a total of 418 LAC and by the end of November; the number had decreased to 390. Unfortunately, eight children (not from the same family) were recently brought into care for significant safety reasons. He described how as part of the Placement and Permanence

Strategy, there is a programme known as “Edge of Care” which attempts to rehabilitate children.

The Committee referred to the retendering of learner transport and asked if there was a structure in place to guarantee the safety of children.

The Head of Strategy, Partnerships and Commissioning advised that the department worked closely with Officers in the Transport Department to ensure the service is cost effective and safe for children. There had been some problems with certain contractors in the past, but there was now a more robust process in place to provide the best value for money, and any reported incidents or complaints would be fully investigated.

The Committee were concerned that Officers had not been able to explain the reported savings and asked what the likely consequences would be if those savings were not met.

The Head of Strategy, Partnerships and Commissioning advised that some figures had been difficult to arrive at as they had relied on Officers in the Transport Department for that information, and as there were no reliable historical figures available, they had to a certain degree based estimates against those figures.

The Committee questioned the estimated £500k in possible income regarding home to school transport.

The Corporate Director – Children explained that they were RAG status proposals, which means there were a number of reasons for the estimates. Cabinet would ultimately make the decision and her advice would be based on the results of the public consultation. She added that if these proposals were not accepted, savings would have to be found elsewhere. The Committee suggested that the figures had been based on the fact that there were 2,004 pupils who would not require transport and at least one of those figures was a cause for concern as they had been based on a school within the Borough which did not have any children dependent on school transport. One Member believed that the budget proposals were based on estimated figures rather than factual, which caused extreme concern.

The Corporate Director – Children advised that the estimate was based on the figures available at the start of consultation. She explained that in terms of RAG status proposals if Cabinet decided not to make any changes, then the projected proposals for 2016/17 would be brought forward and alternatives would need to be found for future years.

The Committee referred to the managed service reduction of the Youth Offending Service Collaboration and asked for feedback on what the impact of that might be and which neighbouring local authorities were participating in the collaboration. Members were also concerned at the reduction in the Youth Service provision across the Borough.

The Head of Strategy, Commissioning and Partnerships informed Members that the Authority was collaborating with Swansea and Neath Port Talbot Councils and the predicted savings were based on that collaboration. Unfortunately, she advised that the numbers in the Youth Service had dropped significantly, part of which was around Statutory and Wellbeing Rehabilitation Orders and more focus had been placed on preventative services instead in order to obtain best value. The savings were based on how to share resources and work more efficiently. Grant funding mainly came from Families First rather than one-off grants from the Big Lottery, as well as Communities First and grants from the Welsh Government.

The Cabinet Member – Children and Young People advised that the Youth Offending Service is managed through a joint Management Board, involving all relevant agencies, with the Board forming part of the decision-making budget process.

One Member commented that the Review of the Education and Welfare Service plays a massive role in improving school attendance levels and meetings were held last week with parents and an Education and Welfare Officer. His concern was that by cutting the service at the same time as the proposals to cut home to school transport it would have a knock on effect, with parents having to choose between paying for their children to attend school, or other priorities.

The Head of Strategy, Commissioning and Partnerships provided some assurance that the cuts will be less than originally predicted and consideration was being given to the role of the Education and Welfare Officers. She advised that the newly formed hubs would help provide further support to families.

A Member was concerned at the proposal to cut support for the Music Service and asked whether this would in future form part of the school budgets which were already under pressure. He believed that this move would mean taking away money from teaching resources and the education of the children, and the biggest impact would be with the smaller primary schools.

The Corporate Director – Children informed Members that the £40k savings would come from management of the service within the Directorate, and the project group had been working with Officers with regard to the County Music Service to consider ways to make it self-sufficient. There was a range of options which could result in a full cost recovery, and one option is to move the Service into a Trust to enable it to attract grant funding. Earlier in the report the decision was made to overwrite the previous decision to top slice school budgets to part fund nursery education being cognisant of the pressure on schools from both the Authority and the Welsh Government which was the reason for trying to find alternative funding to mitigate those pressures.

The Headteacher Cynffig Comprehensive School informed the Committee that Headteachers had welcomed that decision, although it was recognised that schools were facing serious budget pressures which she believed was being compounded by schools having to pay out of their budgets for such things as copy write licenses, transport and carbon reduction, which caused concern. It was hoped those costs could be minimised in order to safeguard the standards schools are required to deliver. She reported that the Estyn inspection at her school had been successful; however given the budget pressures those standards would be difficult to maintain.

One Member asked what the reaction was from Headteachers regarding the fact that schools would be required to pay for part of the Educational Psychology Service in the future.

The Headteacher advised that there was already a process in place where schools were entitled to the provision and it was a concern for Headteachers and she hoped it did not reach the stage where a school was unable to afford to pay for that profession.

The Corporate Director – Children advised that in the past the Service had offered the very best and had raised the bar in terms of expectations. The Authority is obliged to provide statutory services and work was being undertaken in the Directorate to understand the core service to meet children's needs and to work around managing demand to ensure a positive outcome for children. Consideration was also being given as to where demand could be diverted to another part of the service, as well as the services within the third sector. She advised that the EPS trading arm was initiated as a way of generating funds to

maintain the service and not have to reduce it. She reported that £20k to £25k a year would be generated from those wishing to buy in extra services. Core statutory services are not part of the EPS trading arm – these services will continue to be delivered to schools for free.

The Head of Strategy, Commissioning and Partnerships advised that plans were being made to remodel part of the service, as the next phase would be to restructure the inclusion service. Over the next year they would be developing smarter service by linking up with other local authorities and a training programme offered to schools and other professionals had proved successful.

The Committee asked for examples of those services schools would be charged for which were non-statutory.

The Corporate Director – Children advised that some schools wanted to carry out staff inset training around foetal alcohol syndrome and ADHD, which were bespoke packages sold to schools. SEN assessments are statutory, but the optional extras would need to be paid for.

A Member asked whether there was a baseline budget available to that service. He commented that the biggest challenge would be customer expectations in the future that the service would be providing statutory provision.

The Cabinet Member – Children and Young People advised that Cabinet had indicated that in future a process would be put in place to review base budgets and not just top slicing each budget by a percentage. With regard to early intervention and prevention, he advised that 90% of those services were non-statutory.

One Member referred to the report on completed English assessments where 30 children missed out in the last quarter and investigations were ongoing to find out why this had happened. He asked how confident Members could be in the proposed savings, given the fluidity and the current budget pressures.

The Head of Safeguarding and Family Support advised that those 30 cases were desk top assessments. The Authority received a number of anonymous referrals from members of the public, but it only interferes in families' lives when necessary. In terms of savings, he advised that it was a challenge as it was impossible to predict. He explained that statutory services were very expensive and there were not the resources to meet all of the responsibilities, which was why the Authority needed to invest in early intervention. He informed Members that a new Social Services and Wellbeing Act had been introduced which would explain the statutory responsibilities and to ensure that a child has access to professional advocacy. Also young carers would receive a service; however there would not be a budget from Central Government to make that happen.

The Chairperson referred to the £500k plus projected savings within the next two years that early intervention would start to pay off; however he was concerned at the size of the projected savings.

The Corporate Director – Children advised that no savings had been put against the Early Intervention and Prevention nor LAC Strategies for this year or next year as it needed two years to embed for transformation to take place and to start to realise any savings through children's needs being met earlier and in the right place. The savings against safeguarding would not come into play for three years. The savings are shown in the report as red due to the risk. The figures may change, but were predicated on a pattern and evidence based which showed a reduction year on year of around 36 LAC. Through the whole system approach, a number of children in need currently managed through Social Services would transfer to integrated working teams which would relieve pressure on the whole system

and Social Services would then be able to work with those children with complex needs, resulting in some savings in the latter years.

The Committee questioned the reduction in the number of care beds, against the policy to reduce the number of out of county placements.

The Head of Safeguarding and Family Support explained that it saddened staff when a child had to be sent out of the Borough. A project was being embarked on to look at care history of children and other local authorities at specialist evidence based proactive interventions and tried and tested techniques. He commented that the Authority could not afford not to try new theories and practices. The intention was to reduce the number of residential beds and pay for them out of investment in therapeutic techniques, to observe during the next four years whether such prevention would reduce the number of beds which were needed. He informed Members that there would always be a case of some children who had to be placed out of county and also those children who needed residential care.

The Chairperson commented that he was under the impression that the Authority was increasing the provision for children with complex needs through the Heronsbridge School rather than out of county.

The Corporate Director – Children advised that discussions had taken place to consider a complete review of residential units and it was therefore put on hold in order to follow due process to go out to consultation and to then bring a range of options to Cabinet in January 2015. She commented that Heronsbridge School may be one option.

The Head of Safeguarding and Family Support explained that there were currently 14 children placed out of county; a few of them had severe autism and two had needs that were so complex and when they become teenagers, they are a risk to other children in a school the size of Heronsbridge. Some of those children needed around the clock provision. He informed Members that some children had been brought back into the Borough and were attending Heronsbridge on a weekly basis.

The Committee asked for feedback on the reduction in school budgets and the surplus places and school provision.

The Corporate Director – Children explained that there were a significant number of surplus places, particularly in Secondary schools, as well as issues around aspiration to raise standards; whilst they were good there was an ambition to further improve them, which is linked to good leadership. She advised that there was an inability to recruit good Headteachers across Wales in both Secondary and Primary schools due to the poor quality of applicants, which there was a history of across Wales just recently. Therefore it was important to ensure that the good Headteachers employed by this Authority were kept and to grow the Deputy Headteachers. She informed Members that she had written to schools to encourage participation in the Schools Task Group; there were also a number of smaller task and finish groups under that to consider educational arrangements in the long term. In the past the local authorities led on what the school modernisation programme should look like whereas the new senior management team also wanted schools involved in the future design. The Directorate was currently looking at innovative practice where pupils from the age of 3 to 19 are educated on one site, as well as federated schools to see whether there was good leadership. She reported that £1m had been put against the Schools Task Group and as it was regarded as high risk, it was shown in the report in red.

The Chairperson thanked the invitees for the attendance and invited the Headteacher Cynffig Comprehensive School to attend a future meeting of the Committee.

**Conclusions:**

- a) Members commented on the lack of detail provided in relation to the 'impact' of the savings proposals put forward for the Children's Directorate. The Committee felt that there should be more explanation provided in order for Members to understand the implications of each proposal and provide suitable comment on them. It was also felt that this detail was necessary given that the report is a public document and therefore should allow for any member of the public to confidently understand each proposal and its impact.
- b) Following discussions with Officers over the savings proposals relating to Learner Transport, the Committee commented that they had no confidence in what was presented in the report due to the lack of evidence over where the figures had been derived from. The Committee recommended that these figures needed considerable examination by Officers as there was a risk that these savings, as presented, were not realistic and achievable.
- c) The Committee expressed concern over the 'one-off pressure' of £350,000 put forward for Looked After Children (LAC), given that Officers could not assure that this pressure would not continue into following years due to the unpredictable nature of the service area. This resulted in further concerns and a lack of confidence in achieving the related savings proposal CH25; 'Reduction in Safeguarding LAC numbers and related reduction in costs.' Members felt that the uncertainty over whether or not the pressure was a 'one-off', somewhat contradicted the evidence supporting CH25 in that it was based on a predicted 'trend'.
- d) CH17: The Committee expressed concern over decreasing the Educational Welfare Service at a time when the need for this service was increasing. Members commented that the reliance being placed on EWOs by schools and the authority for such aspects as improving attendance, when there were also plans to reduce home to school transport services, did not then correspond with reducing the budget for this provision.
- e) In relation to the proposal to remodel Children's Residential Care, Members questioned the rationale behind this for a number of reasons:
  1. the Specialist provision currently provided has almost always been reported as full;
  2. the rationale behind the current complex needs residential provision set up in 2012 was to enable the Authority to bring LAC who are, or would be, placed Out of County, within County at a reduced financial cost to the Authority;
  3. Due to relatively new strategies and new projects, there is not yet evidence that the early intervention work being carried out in Bridgend has yet led to a reduction of children needing to come into residential care. Whilst supporting early intervention, Members questioned what is to be done in the meantime for those young people who have already passed the point where early intervention would be appropriate;
  4. Whilst supporting the involvement of parents with children with disabilities in decisions over where money could be spent to better support them, the removal of respite care to these parents could be detrimental;

Given the uncertainties surrounding this proposal, Members questioned the achievability of this saving, particularly given that there is a projected saving on this area of £300,000 for the coming year.

- f) Members further commented that should this proposal be progressed, urgent and imminent decisions need to be made in order to clarify the situation for staff to minimise uncertainty and the possibility of valuable and experienced staff leaving the Authority.
- g) As a result of their discussions with Officers, Members questioned the achievability of the savings proposals put forward given that, as stated by Officers, a number of them would either not now be achieved or the saving has been greatly reduced. The examples given were:
  - h) CH17: Officers reported the reduction of the education welfare service was going to be far less than the 50% put forward;
  - i) SCH2: The report states that the reduction in school budgets of £750,000, on condition of a reversal of Cabinet's decision, will not be achieved;
  - j) CH29: Officers reported that the reduction for Remodelling the Youth Service Counselling Function for Schools was under consultation but was going to be less than that stated in the report.
  - k) Given the numerous changes reported, Members expressed concerns over where the Directorate would now find these savings from. The Committee hoped that a revised, more accurate version of the Savings Proposals report, reflecting the above points, and any similar revisions, is planned to be put before Council for final approval.
- l) Furthermore, given the information above obtained by the Committee, as well as concerns over the achievability of other 'predicted' savings such as reducing the numbers of LAC, the proposed remodelling of Children's Residential Care and the uncertainty over the reliability of proposals in relation to Learner Transport, the Committee did not feel that they could have confidence in the accuracy and achievability of the savings proposals put forward for the Children's Directorate in the MTFS.
- m) Members made reference to SCH5, the savings proposal for reducing Nursery Early Years provision, and recommended that any future changes to this service area needed to include further consultation given that the previous decision to top slice school budgets is unlikely to be progressed.
- n) Members suggested that in order to improve Members' knowledge and gain a greater understanding of which budget pressures are most difficult to address, it would be useful for the Committee to receive a more informative breakdown of the baseline budget for statutory provision followed by additional budget information in relation to those budgets where there is greater scope for local discretion.
- o) In relation to the public budget consultation process, the Committee commented on the lack of public attendance and involvement and suggested that other local authorities be looked at to consider other possible methods of engagement and how best to increase this.

#### **Additional info**

Members requested that they receive a detailed breakdown for the meeting in February of the proposed savings put forward for Home to School Transport.

Members requested that they receive further detailed information relating to the remodelling of Children's Residential Care as soon as possible in the New Year.



150 COUNCIL'S PERFORMANCE AGAINST ITS CORPORATE PLAN 2013-17

The Scrutiny Officer presented a report to introduce the Children's Directorate Dashboard report to the Committee, attached at Appendix 1, with an overview of the Council's progress in delivering its commitments for 2014-15. The report covered performance of services relevant to this Committee as at the end of Quarter Two.

Discussion took place and the Committee were concerned that some LAC had three or more placements during the year.

The Head of Safeguarding and Family Support advised that it was in fact rare for LAC to have more than three placements; however there were occasions when it was unavoidable when there were complex child protection cases and also when there are a number of siblings from the same family, as attempts were made to keep them together. He stressed that the decision to move a child from one placement to another was not taken lightly. He commented that Bridgend still remained highly regarded across Wales.

The Committee questioned the level of sickness absence in the Directorate.

The Corporate Director – Children explained that there were a number of staff on long term sickness absence; however the focus had recently shifted towards those staff who were regularly off sick, yet not enough to be flagged up within the current system. Therefore, a number of strategies had been put in place to ensure they are supported and have access to a doctor when they need it. She advised that staff within Social Services managed high caseloads which contributed to stress.

The Committee referred to the £246k overspend due to nine agency staff on long term contracts and asked whether this was under control.

The Head of Safeguarding and Family Support explained that the number of agency staff was being maintained at an absolute minimum. There had been a significant number of highly complex child protection cases however, and he asked Members to note that there had been a need for support from agency staff as a number of Social Workers were only in their second year of practice. He stressed the need to support those Social Workers, otherwise there would be even more staff going off sick and advised that the agency staff were necessary in order to deliver an effective service to those children with complex cases. A Recruitment and Retention Board was put in place and only experienced Social Workers were interviewed, with three considerably experienced Social Workers starting in January next year.

The Committee asked what was being done to support those staff suffering from stress and in ensuring that new Social Workers are retained long term.

The Head of Safeguarding and Family Support advised that emotional pressure was recognised and a proactive stance was taken accordingly, with the supervision given to Social Workers being monitored. They were also offered support in the way of mentoring, with consultant Social Workers providing supervision which had been proved to lower anxiety. They are also offered assistance in writing up case notes, and no new cases are allocated to those who are vulnerable at any time.

**Conclusions:**

Members requested that they receive further detail in relation to the Additional Sickness Absence Information as the Committee were not clear how the figures presented in the report were calculated.

In light of the concerns expressed by the CRI Scrutiny Committee over sickness absence in schools and schools that do not adopt the corporate sickness absence policy and therefore do not undertake return to work interviews; Members requested that they also receive sickness absence data for schools in their quarterly performance reports.

Members expressed concern over the number of agency staff still employed within Children's Services, given that Officers have reported to Scrutiny over the past year about the drive to reduce agency staff. Members commented that not only are the figures reported similar to the average number engaged last year, but the total cost is higher due to longer engagement. Members agreed to raise this under their further work when looking at the recruitment and retention of social workers.

#### **Forward Work Programme Update**

The Scrutiny Officer presented a report outlining the items due to be considered at a special meeting of the Committee due to be held on the 6<sup>th</sup> January 2015 to discuss School Performance, prior to it going to Cabinet, and further sought confirmation of the invitees to attend the subsequent scheduled meeting to be held on the 17<sup>th</sup> February 2015.

#### **Conclusions:**

The Committee noted the topics due to be considered at a special meeting of the Committee scheduled for the 6<sup>th</sup> January 2015 and acknowledged the invitees to attend the ordinary meeting of the Committee on the 17<sup>th</sup> February 2015.

The meeting closed at 5.20 pm