

Meeting of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee

28 January 2025

Responses to Recommendations / Information requested.

	Recommendations / Information Requested:	Response:	Accepted / Partially Accepted / Not Accepted:
Medium Term Financial Strategy 2025-26 and Draft Budget Consultation Process			
Recommendations			
1	<p><u>Bridgend Music Service</u></p> <p>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.</p> <p>The Committee strongly recommended that Bridgend Music Service be retained as a fully subsidised service.</p> <p>However, whilst recognising that it was a significant budget pressure, the</p>	<p>Submitted to Cabinet on 4 February 2025 for Response.</p>	Accepted

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	<p>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.</p> <p>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.</p>		
2	<p><u>Counselling Services</u></p> <p>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</i></p>	<p>Submitted to Cabinet on 4 February 2025 for Response.</p>	Accepted

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	<i>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.	Submitted to Cabinet on 4 February 2025 for Response .	Accepted

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4	<p><u>School Delegated Budgets – SCH 1</u></p> <p>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 significant proposed budget reduction for the reasons above.</p>	<p>Submitted to Cabinet on 4 February 2025 for Response.</p>	<p>Not Accepted</p>

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5	<p><u>Grant funding</u></p> <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p>	<p>Submitted to Cabinet on 4 February 2025 for Response.</p>	<p>Accepted</p>

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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.	<p>Please see attached letter.</p> <p>A significant proportion of the extra funding was grants. This is outside of the settlement.</p> <p>As a local authority we received a 3.8% and this has to pay for all pay, price and unavoidable pressures, which were set out in the MTFS.</p> <p>As part of the budget, we will be funding schools for pay, price and national insurance pressures.</p>  <p>Education Funding_ENG.pdf</p>	Accepted
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.	<p>The PAN for each school is publicly available in the Starting Schools Prospectus for each school year.</p>  <p>starting-school-prospectus-2025-2026.pdf</p>	

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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.	The Rhiw Car park, still retains an offer of free parking for the first three hours. So as a result, the income that is generated from charging is lower than pre pandemic levels, when it was charged all day. The amount of revenue generated in this car park can vary dependent on day, time of year, weather and if there are events held in the town centre. In the last full year, the Rhiw Car Park generated £51,266 in income. If this is divided equally by all operating days, the average income generated from this car park per day is £143.	Accepted
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.	Scrutiny actioned with Chair of SOSOC 3 in Forward Work Planning meeting with Chair and Corporate Director.	Accepted

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Budget Monitoring 2024-25 – Quarter 3 Revenue Forecast			
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.	<p>Services have been asked to review their spend and reduce it to the budget where possible.</p> <p>Where this is not possible due to increasing service demands and pressures, the draft budget for 2025/26 does propose funding cost pressures to meet the service pressures.</p>	Accepted
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	<p>Welsh Government has set the requirements for the provision of free home-to-school transport in the Learner Travel (Wales) Measure 2008 (the Measure), the local authority has for many years provided free transport well beyond that required by the Measure.</p> <p>There is no indication from Welsh Government of any significant changes to the eligibility thresholds for free home-to-school transport in the near or medium term.</p>	

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	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.	<p>As part of the MTFs efficiencies proposed for 2025-2026 onwards, in July 2024 Cabinet determined significant changes to the eligibility criteria for the provision of free home-to-school/college transport in the current policy from September 2025 following a public consultation. The new Home-to-School Transport Policy 2025 will significantly reduce the eligibility of school pupils and college learners across Bridgend, invoking financial savings year-on-year.</p> <p>Historically, the public bus network in Bridgend has only supported learners attending Bridgend College. From September 2025, as the aforementioned policy position in Bridgend changes, no college learners will be eligible for free transport. Therefore, as the local authority will not rely on public transport network for the provision of free home-to-school/college transport, the link with national government's review of the local/national bus networks will not impact upon the continued provision of home-to-school transport in Bridgend.</p>	

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12	<p>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.</p> <p>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.</p>	<p>It is not possible to quantify precisely why there has been an increase in the number of pupils with additional learning needs. However, it is important to recognise this is not unique to Bridgend.</p> <p>National data suggests contributing factors impacting on our service demands include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The increase in demand for complex medical support as well as emerging needs within the early years sector, which may in part be as a result of babies surviving more complex medical conditions from birth; • There is a greater awareness of additional learner needs by parents and teachers; • One area in particular has seen a significant increase is pupils on the pathway to and diagnosed with neurodevelopmental needs such as Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and 	

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		<p>Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> We are still understanding the impact of the 'covid generation' and the increased use of screens and social media on early development. <p>Please see embedded Estyn Thematic review of the additional learning needs system.</p> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; align-items: center;">   </div> <p>Thematic Review 220622-the-addition ALN system Decembeal-learning-needs-coc</p>	
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 work was necessary to fully understand all of the	Scrutiny actioned with Chair of SOSC 1 in Forward Work Planning meeting with Chair and Corporate Director.	

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	<p>reasons driving the increase in demand and overspend in ALN services.</p> <p>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.</p>		