

Scrutiny Budget Working Group Recommendations 2025

	Scrutiny Recommendation:	Cabinet Response:	Accepted/ Partially Accepted / Not Accepted:
<u>Council Wide - Recommendations:</u>			
1	<u>Invest to Save</u> The Group discussed that previously, proposed invest to save models had become cost avoidance measures which helped services to manage increases in demand, but financial savings had not been realised and removed from ongoing budgets and recommended that any future proposed invest to save models include a robust analysis clearly setting out: a. the proposed change and what it will look like; b. how it will be implemented accompanied by a SMART action plan; c. what changes it will make to service provision and to cost; and d. the date by which the savings will be achieved and can be removed from the future budget.		
2	<u>Transformation</u> The Group discussed feedback from each of the Deep Dive Groups that highlighted transformation was needed in order to ensure sustainability of future service delivery and recommended:		

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	a. an in-depth review of the remit and structure of all Directorates and how they work, including the appropriateness of which services sit in each Directorate (e.g. 4G Pitches currently in Social Services Wellbeing Directorate) with a view to transformation rather than savings and avoiding duplication of efforts across the Authority; b. as part of the reviews, consideration be given to where the use of technology and Artificial Intelligence can be expedited; c. that Cabinet consider the reviews and whether there is sufficient capacity to invest capital given the number of capital pressures from all Directorates which will require prioritisation; and d. that consideration be given to establishing a Transformation Working Group to sit under the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee (COSC) and whether Transformation should be a standing item on the COSC Agenda.		
3	<u>Capital Programme</u> The Group expressed concern regarding the perceived piecemeal and fragmented approach to the Capital Programme and discussed the Council's ability to borrow at competitive interest		

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	rates. The Group recommended that consideration be given to developing a more focussed Capital Programme driven by the needs of the services with robust business cases, plans and projects setting out clear objectives and deliverables and that consideration be given to utilising our borrowing capacity to deliver revenue savings.		
4	<u>Council Assets</u> The Group discussed the list of buildings and premises owned by the Council and noted that it included a number of residential properties. The Group recommended that an exercise be undertaken: a. to ascertain whether any assets could be released to generate monies or an additional narrative provided setting out why they are being retained and on what terms and conditions; and b. to ascertain whether all buildings are being used to their full potential for internal use or as potential income generating opportunities by renting out.		

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<u>Chief Executive's Directorate - Recommendations:</u>			
5	<u>CCTV (Indicative Budget Reduction Proposal 2026-27 - CEX 6)</u> The Group discussed the provision of CCTV and that although the budget also includes support for some Council services, the largest user of the CCTV service are the Police. The Group therefore recommended that the Police be asked to financially contribute to the provision of the CCTV and should they refuse, that consideration be given to withdrawing their use.		
6	<u>Budget Reduction Proposal CEX 3</u> The Group recommended that Cabinet reconsider budget reduction proposal not progressed last year, CEX 3, regarding the review of the discretionary payments made to senior member salary holders to see if there is any scope to achieve savings.		
7	<u>Fees and Charges</u> The Group considered the Council's <u>Fees and Charges 2025/26</u> and the income generating possibilities and recommended that Cabinet consider an above inflationary rise in all fees and charges that are not set by other bodies, e.g. 10%.		

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<u>Education, Early Years and Young People Directorate – Recommendations:</u>			
8	<u>Further Indicative 1% Reduction to Schools Delegated Budgets</u> The Group expressed significant concern regarding the number of schools projecting a deficit budget and questioned the recoverability of the deficits given the level of deficits and the challenges facing schools. The Group therefore unanimously recommended that the further indicative reduction of 1% to school delegated budgets for 2026-27 should be removed.		
9	<u>Education Welfare Service (EEYYP4)</u> The Group discussed the significant increase in issues regarding attendance, behaviour and exclusions and expressed significant concern regarding the risk posed by the proposed reduction to the Education Welfare Service. The Group therefore strongly recommended that the budget reduction proposal not progressed last year, EEYYP4 should not be pursued.		
10	<u>Unallocated Funding be Cascaded to Councils in Addition to their Core Funding</u> The Group discussed the Welsh Government announcement regarding the minimum 2.3% increase to local government from which schools get their core funding, the unallocated funding which could support frontline services such as		

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	schools and that last year, there was consequential funding for education in Wales within the UK budget. The Group recommended that the Leader and those that sit on the on the Welsh Local Government Association lobby for the unallocated funding to be cascaded to councils in addition to their core funding to support schools.		
11	<u>Proposal to Close Small Schools (EYYP4)</u> The Group discussed the budget reduction proposal not progressed last year relating to the proposal to close smaller schools and recommended that consideration be given to the viability of federated models for schools instead and, in addition, when a headteacher vacancy arises, that consideration be given to the possibility of sharing an existing headteacher for multiple small schools. The Group also recommended that any proposed closure has regard to forthcoming local housing developments and how it will affect demand and pupil roll numbers.		
<u>Social Services and Wellbeing Directorate - Recommendations:</u>			
12	<u>In-House Residential Provision for Care Experienced Children (CEC)</u> The Group discussed the significant cost of residential provision for CEC, the elimination of		

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	profit legislation and the necessity for transformation of service delivery. In particular, the Group discussed the need for in-house residential provision, that an invest to save model is vital for the Directorate to manage the incoming level of demand and need and recommended that Cabinet consider including social care in the Capital Programme proposed in recommendation 3 above and providing an appropriate capital budget for the Directorate at the times when it's needed to support them as required.		
13	<u>Budget Reduction Proposals 2025/26 not progressed</u> The Group recognised the need and level of budget growth and invest to save that was being considered and that savings were also required. The Group therefore recommended that Cabinet reconsider the SSW Budget Reduction Proposals 2025/26 not progressed and whether any can be safely repackaged with a view to transformation rather than savings.		
14	<u>Community Hubs – SSW 5 proposal not progressed to reduce library facilities related services</u> The Group discussed the upcoming Community Hubs report to the Social Services, Health and Wellbeing Overview and Scrutiny Committee and		

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	the positive impact that an integrated Community Hub could have on residents and possible cost savings of multi-agency service delivery and recommended that the Community Hubs be explored to realise this potential as far as possible.		
<u>Communities Directorate - Recommendations:</u>			
15	<u>Grant Funding</u> The Group discussed the level of bureaucracy around some grant funding applications and the perceived lack of a prior clear overall plan regarding the purpose and intent of the grant funding and the most appropriate grant funding which should be applied for. The Group recommended a value for money exercise be undertaken to ensure grant funding applications are as efficient as possible and that grants sought delivered the maximum potential aligned to a clear plan for its use.		
16	<u>Housing and Homelessness Budget</u> Given the current budget for housing and homelessness, the Group discussed the current housing policy and whether the Council could be more aggressive in the housing market. The Group recommended that the consideration be given to continuing to increase the Council's housing stock		

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	through the purchase of Houses of Multiple Occupancy and building our own and that advice be sought regarding the point at which the Council would need to decide whether or not to become a Housing Authority.		
17	<u>Flood Prevention</u> The Group discussed the increasing adverse weather events and that the risks of and response to flooding represented a corporate risk to the Authority. The Group recommended that: a. that flood prevention measures be prioritised with an invest to save model as prevention is cheaper than repairs after the fact; b. consideration be given to the Council's emergency response should defences fail, including whether the Council will purchase and hold emergency provision or a strategy of being able to import such provision at short notice; and c. discussions are held with neighbouring local authorities regarding their approach to flood prevention and sharing best practice.		
18	<u>Engineering Services</u> The Group discussed the Council's approach to engineering services and that engineers seem to		

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	be scattered throughout the authority, e.g. highways, property, civil engineers, etc. and recommended that consideration be given to adopting a robust central engineering practice and the possibility of recruitment of a senior lead engineer with a desire to achieve transformation of service delivery and proactively manage the Council's estate.		
19	<u>Enforcement</u> The Group discussed the frustrations regarding continuous cases of fly tipping and the perception that the Council do not take enforcement action, highlighting that education to prevent such cases has its limits. The Group also discussed the issue of overrunning road works and parking infractions in highways and recommended that consideration be given to adopting a more proactive and robust approach to enforcement and that a business case be developed to invest in the Enforcement Team to target the most prolific offenders, also establishing whether the increased enforcement could achieve a cost neutral position or possibly generate income. The Group also recommended that discussions are held with neighbouring local authorities regarding their approach to enforcement and sharing best practice.		