

Scrutiny Budget Working Group Recommendations 2025

	Scrutiny Recommendation:	Cabinet Response:	Accepted/ Partially Accepted / Not Accepted:
Council Wide - Recommendations:			
1	<p><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:</p> <p>a. the proposed change and what it will look like;</p> <p>b. how it will be implemented accompanied by a SMART action plan;</p> <p>c. what changes it will make to service provision and to cost; and</p> <p>d. the date by which the savings will be achieved and can be removed from the future budget.</p>	<p>The recommendation is agreed. As part of the transformation work all Invest to Save schemes will have to be supported by a robust business plan which will be monitored to ensure service and financial outcomes are achieved.</p> <p>Both social services and education are preparing proposals to reduce spend on demand led budget for implementation in the current year. It is envisaged that Earmarked Reserves could be used, up to £3m, for these areas to meet demand more effectively to deliver savings / reduce spend.</p>	Accepted
2	<p><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:</p>	<p>The draft budget for next year includes proposals to fund a new strategic transformation function within the Authority. This function will :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work across all service areas, dealing with services on an agreed priority basis 	Accepted

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	<p>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;</p> <p>b. as part of the reviews, consideration be given to where the use of technology and Artificial Intelligence can be expedited;</p> <p>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</p> <p>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.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • review the use of technology and AI across services to ensure it supports and enhances service delivery and efficiency. The proposal in the draft estimates includes £600,000 for programme and project management to create systemic change capacity to ensure the authority is able to deliver on its programmes for change • Funding is also proposed to support ICT with the replacement of key systems to ensure efficient working practices going forward. • Funding is also proposed to support workforce changes and development • The governance arrangements for the transformation programme will include the reporting arrangements for the programme. Consideration will be given as to how COSC can be involved in this work. <p>When reviewing services the requirement for both revenue and capital funding will be considered.</p>	
3	<p><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</p>	<p>There is already a robust process in place with the Capital Programme developed in line with the Capital Strategy. This includes discussions with Cabinet at an early stage.</p>	Accepted

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	<p>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.</p>	<p>The funding of the capital programme takes into account all funding options available and any subsequent revenue costs that may be incurred.</p> <p>The introduction of increased capacity in programme management will ensure that projects are delivered in line with approved scheme.</p>	
4	<p><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:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) The Asset Register of the Council is being reviewed as part of the new Asset Management Plan for 2026/27. Where assets are identified as surplus to requirement they will be brought forward for disposal. A significant programme of office rationalisation has been undertaken over the past five years including the disposal of Ravens Court and it is intended that this approach will continue where properties are no longer required. b) The utilisation of corporate property is a key part of ensuring the efficient use of the Council's estate. There are examples of where we have rented corporate property to partner agencies, including the fourth floor of the Civic Offices to the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH). This delivers a rental income for the Council. We are currently undertaking a study of utilisation of the floor space in the Civic Offices to understand 	Accepted

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		<p>how spaces are used and whether any further efficiencies can be achieved.</p> <p>It is proposed that this is included as a key corporate project</p>	
Chief Executive's Directorate - Recommendations:			
5	<p><u>CCTV (Indicative Budget Reduction Proposal 2026-27 - CEX 6)</u></p> <p>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.</p>	<p>This is reflected in the draft MTFs proposals and has been discussed with the Police and Crime Commissioner following the comments in the Budget Working Group. Considerations are being given to the use of technology to offset the implications of changed funding at the request of the Police and Crime Commissioner</p>	Accepted
6	<p><u>Budget Reduction Proposal CEX 3</u></p> <p>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.</p>	<p>The schedule of remuneration will be reviewed annually and discretionary payments considered based on the demand / requirements each year. Any changes to the schedule will be considered by full Council.</p>	Partially accepted
7	<p><u>Fees and Charges</u></p> <p>The Group considered the Council's <u>Fees and</u></p>	<p>Fees and Charges are considered each year as part of the budget setting process in line with the fees</p>	Accepted

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	<u>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%.	and charges policy, along with the default being that all fees and charges increase in line with inflation. Where this is not the case the rationale is reported to Council as part of the budget setting process. As services are reviewed going forward the impact of increases above the rate of inflation will be built into the review to determine the financial and service impact of such changes	
Education, Early Years and Young People Directorate – Recommendations:			
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.	Following the recommendations of the Scrutiny Budget Working Group, and the better than anticipated settlement, schools have not been tasked with finding any budget reductions from their delegated budgets for 2026/27, and there are currently no proposed budget reductions for schools for 2027/28. Cabinet is giving consideration to options during 2026/27 to retain sufficient head room in the budget to ensure this can be delivered for 2027/28	Accepted
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	Following the recommendations of the Scrutiny Budget Working Group, and the better than anticipated settlement, there are no proposed budget reductions for the Education Welfare Service in the 2026/27 budget.	Accepted

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	reduction proposal not progressed last year, EYYP4 should not be pursued.		
10	<p><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 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.</p>	Lobbying has taken place and continues to do so, the results of which are reflected in the draft MTFS proposals.	Accepted
11	<p><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.</p>	<p>As part of the School Modernisation Programme the whole school estate is continuously reviewed. The Federation model has been adopted in Bridgend with the Garw Federation being one such example of this.</p> <p>In respect of small schools, consideration will be given to the viability of federations and where a headteacher post becomes vacant, opportunities to establish an executive headteacher position having</p>	Accepted

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	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.	<p>management oversight of a number of small schools.</p> <p>The local authority will ensure that any proposed closure of a small school continues to have regard to pupil yield from planned housing developments.</p> <p>The local authority will also pay due regard to Welsh Government guidance in respect of this matter.</p>	
Social Services and Wellbeing Directorate - Recommendations:			
12	<p><u>In-House Residential Provision for Care Experienced Children (CEC)</u></p> <p>The Group discussed the significant cost of residential provision for CEC, the elimination of 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.</p>	<p>Capital schemes are agreed to meet corporate priorities therefore there are no generic allocations in the programme. The importance of this service requirement is acknowledged and funding was approved for one acquisition and development at Council in January 2026.</p> <p>As further schemes are developed by the service they will be evaluated and considered in the normal process for funding and inclusion in the Capital programme.</p>	Accepted

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13	<p><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.</p>	<p>This is ongoing as part of the Transformation programme. Invest to save business cases are being developed for adult social care and child and family services.</p>	Accepted
14	<p><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 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.</p>	<p>A community hubs steering group chaired by the Deputy Leader is meeting in January. The group comprises all parts of the Council and key partners. It is vital all engage in this work to maximise asset usage and make this model a success.</p> <p>Scrutiny is also asked if it could consider this subject as part of any associated policy and strategy scrutiny work it undertakes.</p>	Accepted
Communities Directorate - Recommendations:			
15	<p><u>Grant Funding</u> The Group discussed the level of bureaucracy around some grant funding applications and the</p>	<p>The Council will review its approach to grant funding applications, to ensure that they align with the</p>	Accepted

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	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.	Council's strategic objectives and represent good value for money. More applicable to larger grants as some grants simply provide essential day to day provision.	
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 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.	We will continue the work to look at increasing the Council's stock of Houses of Multiple Occupation and will also look at different options to increase the supply of temporary accommodation. Consideration will be given as to whether Earmarked Reserves could be utilised on an invest to save basis	Accepted
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		Accepted

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	<p>Authority. The Group recommended that:</p> <p>a. that flood prevention measures be prioritised with an invest to save model as prevention is cheaper than repairs after the fact;</p> <p>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</p> <p>c. discussions are held with neighbouring local authorities regarding their approach to flood prevention and sharing best practice.</p>	<p>a. The Directorate will look to prioritise spend on flood prevention measures, in addition to what is currently being procured, including equipment to assist in prevention work including ditching machines and gully cleansing.</p> <p>b. The Cabinet is proposing we establish a fund to assist residents whose property may have been affected by flooding or inclement weather. This will be funded by an Earmarked Reserve.</p> <p>c. Discussions are regularly held with neighbouring LA's on winter maintenance regimes and best practice, both at Officer and Director level.</p>	
18	<p><u>Engineering Services</u> The Group discussed the Council's approach to engineering services and that engineers seem to 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.</p>	<p>Engineers from multi-disciplines, such as drainage and highways are located within the Communities Directorate, with the majority sitting within the Engineering Team in Highways. There are also mechanical and electrical engineers who work in the Corporate Landlord Service Area. There are also instances where engineering services, such as structural are contracted in via our SLA with WSP. This is because we do not retain that specialism in house. So, the engineering service is currently a hybrid mix of in-house and outsourced specialists. A review of this delivery mechanism will be undertaken to ascertain whether there would be any efficiencies</p>	Accepted

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		to be gained from a corporate service approach, albeit most Local Authorities do adopt a modern hybrid approach and bring in resource when required.	
19	<p><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.</p>	<p>A review of enforcement activities will be undertaken & also benchmarking with other Local Authorities, to understand if there are best practice examples that can be implemented in BCBC.</p> <p>Balance is needed between education and enforcement, with recognition that education is key and prevention is always more effective. Over the last 3 years fly-tipping has reduced, evidencing that the Authority's approach has been successful.</p>	Partially Accepted