

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD IN COUNCIL CHAMBER, CIVIC OFFICES ANGEL STREET BRIDGEND CF31 4WB ON THURSDAY, 21 JANUARY 2016 AT 2.00 PM**

Present

Councillor EP Foley – Chairperson

DK Edwards  
G Phillips

CA Green  
RL Thomas

PN John  
C Westwood

M Jones  
DBF White

Registered Representatives:

Mr W Bond

Officers:

Nicola Echanis	Head of Strategy Partnerships & Commissioning
Deborah McMillan	Corporate Director Education & Family Support
Joanne Norman	Finance Manager - Education, Transformation and Communities
Arron Norman	Finance Manager - Social Services Wellbeing, Resources & LARS
Kevin Stephens	Democratic Services Assistant
Rachel Keepins	Democratic Services Officer - Scrutiny
Mark Galvin	Senior Democratic Services Officer - Committees

209. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from the following Members:-

Councillor K Watts  
Councillor N Farr  
Councillor P Davies  
Mr T Cahalane  
Reverend Canon Edward J Evans  
Mr K Pascoe

210. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None

211. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE

The Assistant Chief Executive – Legal and Regulatory Services submitted a report, the purpose of which, was to present the items due to be considered at the Committee meeting to be held on 9 March 2016, and to present a list of further potential items for prioritisation by the Committee.

Paragraph 4.1 of the report, listed the items recommended for the agenda at the next scheduled meeting, whilst paragraph 4.2 of the report gave a list of potential items for consideration at subsequent meetings, as part of the Committee Forward Work Programme.

Following consideration of the report, and the subsequent debate that followed on this item, it was

- Resolved:**
- (1) That the item scheduled for the next scheduled meeting on the topic of Residential Remodelling be deferred to a future meeting, and that this be replaced with a report regarding Children with Disabilities.
  - (2) That a further item be added to the Committee's Forward Work Programme to be considered at a future meeting, providing an update on progress at the Coleg Cymunedol Y Dderwen Comprehensive School.

212. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2016-17 TO 2019-20

The Chairperson welcomed to the meeting the Invitees, and the meeting progressed immediately with questions from Members.

A Member noted that the previous version of the MTFs assumed a 4.5% increase in Council Tax for 2016-17. However, the 2016-17 draft Revenue Budget shown at Table 7 in the report, assumed a Council tax increase now of 3.9%, largely as a result of the better than predicted financial settlement from Welsh Government. She felt that this increase was disproportionate when compared to the increased settlement and that in light of this the proposed increase should be less than the anticipated 3.9%.

The Deputy Leader explained that setting the Budget of the local authority was a 'balancing act', and that one of the main priorities was protecting frontline services. The Council was still required to find a saving that totalled 37m over the next 3 years. Whilst the local authority would prefer either a smaller increase in Council tax or no increase at all, this was not possible as it would result in key services being cut even more than was already being anticipated.

In response to a question from Members regarding significant areas of impact in the MTFs, the Corporate Director Social Services and Wellbeing confirmed that a number of proposals had been considered in the MTFs relating to Safeguarding, and obviously an important element of this was ways of looking to reduce the number of cases of LAC in the future. Methods to achieve this needed to be closely looked at in order to reduce these numbers safely, but it was recognised that this would take time, particularly in order to successfully achieve this goal long term.

Another area for significant savings was Residential Care with further support for increased independence through enablement and progression in Learning Disability Services. In order to secure the necessary savings that were required in these and other service areas, methods of work had to be deployed differently and in a more innovative and modernised manner. The different approaches to delivering services were also required in order to fit in with the new Social Services and Wellbeing Act. The Corporate Director Social Services and Wellbeing advised that there were complex challenges ahead and these would not necessarily be easy to meet due to the pressure of timescales for remodelling and the need to secure savings. She added that there were no imminent proposals to reduce the complement of staff, as these were required both to deliver all the changes necessary as part of the Budget Reduction proposals, as well as to continue to manage their respective day-to-day duties.

The Corporate Director Social Services and Wellbeing reassured the Committee that all changes would be undertaken in both a safe and planned way to meet the reduction targets.

The Corporate Director Education and Transformation echoed the comments made by the Corporate Director Social Services and Wellbeing, and in terms of education

prospects for young children in the County Borough, she reported that these were currently better and more improved than they had been for some significant time. Notwithstanding this, the local authority would remain ambitious and look to drive forward even more improvements for children and young persons. The threats, such as reductions in the MTFS, had made her Directorate more creative, and working collaboratively as part of the Central South Consortium had greatly assisted the School Improvement Service.

The Chairperson noted that in terms of the Learner Travel there were no significant budget cuts in the next financial year and that cuts in this area were primarily proposed in the subsequent years of the MTFS.

The Corporate Director Education and Transformation advised that last September Cabinet agreed to change the Learner Travel Policy. It had also since been agreed that the changes proposed to this would be phased in over quite a long period of time. The 1<sup>st</sup> cohort changes she explained would affect Year 7 pupils this coming September, with a caveat however, that those young people at the school with siblings also being taught at the particular school, would continue to obtain free transport to/from the school. In view of the fact that Officers were venturing into uncharted territories regarding accurate savings that were predicted in this service area, it had proven difficult to itemise these as part of Budget Reduction proposals up to the end of the period of the MTFS in 2019-20. Some children were now walking to/from school, whereas previously they had been transported there/home. Officers were attempting to get some meaningful data together to more accurately reflect the extent of savings that would be made as part of the changes to this service provision. This would involve a re-tender process for the future provision of different types of transport that would be required to match the needs of the service, whether this be coaches, mini buses or taxi's. It was about continuing an acceptable level of service as required by legislation, but at the same time making the required savings under the MTFS.

The Head of Strategy, Partnerships and Commissioning advised that research work being undertaken would allow the extent of savings to be better quantified, as the savings that were predicted were very much based on guesswork at the current time. The achievement of estimated savings needed to be realistic and spread over a longer period than had originally been intended.

The Deputy Leader added that as a result of feedback from the expansive Consultation exercise undertaken on proposed changes to Learner Travel, including recommendations that had been taken on board from the Children & Young People O&SC, further changes had been agreed by Cabinet. These included proposals for those students Post 16 where it had been acknowledged that the pay and place rates for their transport provision had been agreed to be too high and these had since been reduced.

A Member noted that last year's budget reduction proposals included significant savings in the service area of Nursery Education, and questioned why they were no longer incorporated into the MTFS.

The Deputy Leader confirmed that Cabinet were proposing to revisit a number of elements of Nursery Education provision, but these would not be included as part of savings in 2016-17, but would be considered as part of reductions not yet fully considered in 2017-18, 2018-19 and 2019-20. The Deputy Leader stated that even though this cost in the region of £1.5m annually to provide, it was one of the best investments that could be made for children as part of their early years education and all Primary School teachers acknowledged this. A decision on savings within this area had to be considered over a long rather than short term period.

A Member referred to ; the re-tendering of Learner Transport contracts at CH3 in the report; where the impact was that lower cost contracts may result in reduced quality of service as well as an increase in the number and complexity of complaints regarding the service. He noted that £500k had been saved in this area in 2015-16 and a further indicative saving of £100k was predicted for 2016-17. Some of the changes to the service were now already being delivered and he asked if any complaints or negative feedback had been received in respect of any change in the quality of service being provided.

The Corporate Director Education and Transformation Services had not heard of any such feedback having been received, however, this would probably be directed to the Communities Directorate as it was ultimately responsible for Bus Transport Contracts. She advised that she would consult the appropriate Officer within this Directorate and ask him to forward on any data that he may have regarding this. She was aware that the odd complaint was sometimes made, usually regarding the condition of some of the buses. These were however, regularly serviced in view of the fact that they transported young people and if there was any doubt whatsoever regarding their suitability to transport pupils, particularly due to reasons of safety, then they were taken off the road. There was a points system in place in terms of the condition of vehicles and if they fell below the required standard then companies who provided the vehicles could be fined or even have their contract taken off them.

The Member also referred to page 30 CH25 and savings proposed due to the projected reduction in Safeguarding LAC numbers which amounted to an approximate saving of £357k in 2016-17 and £520k in 2017-18. He asked for reassurance from Invitees that there would be enough resources in place bearing in mind the level of these projected cuts, to adequately and safely support LAC cases including reactive as well as planned work emanating from this service.

The Corporate Director Social Services and Wellbeing advised there were a considerable number of reasons why young people were taken into a caring environment, and all of these were covered by strict regulations (e.g. through Legal Orders being made) and/or other statutory requirements. Officers looked at a number of key issues, for example, the LAC population and the reasons why the individual in question had been placed into care. Some situations were more complex than others, whilst some were in Out of County placements which were often associated with a high cost, others are accommodated In-House. The appropriate setting for a young person to be placed in was something that had to be carefully considered. In most situations we would want a child to have a placement in house however this is not always possible especially if the child or young person has very specialist needs or if the placement has to be found in an emergency.

A very important part of the process is also to look at early help and prevention support and approaches. The Corporate Director Social Services and Wellbeing added that work was ongoing between the safeguarding team and the early help and prevention team to bring their strategies together in order to best support the needs of the looked after population. She was pleased to confirm that within the last 2 years or so the numbers of LAC had reduced, and these figures were monitored on a weekly basis. There were 368 in total at the present time, whereas 18 months ago there were 412. It was important given the saving reductions the Authority had to make year on year, that there were sufficient levels of front line staff, for example Social Workers, to fully support LAC cases in a safe and efficient way, through team approach methods

The Chairperson was aware that the Authority were responsible for putting Special Guardianship Orders in place, and that the increasing numbers of these were putting

further pressure on Council resources, both financially speaking and in terms of Officer time.

The Corporate Director Social Services and Wellbeing confirmed that the numbers of children subject to these Orders fluctuated, and as was the case to a degree with LAC. She added that she would update the Committee on the number of Special Guardianship Orders, outside of the meeting, as she was unsure whether or not these were increasing.

The Cabinet Member – Children’s Social Services and Equalities confirmed that the Indicative cuts in terms of support for LAC were now £357k, when originally these cuts had been projected to be 585k.

A Member referred to CH9 on page 27 of the papers, i.e. School transport route efficiencies, and as he was passionate about young people have a voice in any consultation or engagement process regarding more efficient routes being identified, particularly as some of the services in terms of school transport provision were being reduced.

The Corporate Director Education and Transformation confirmed that the Authority did consult and engage with young people in terms of any change in service affecting both the school they were taught in, and on other key issues such as Home to School Transport provision.

In terms of school transport routes, even though these had been reduced in line with savings required under the MTFs, more efficient methods and approaches were being put in place for future provision. A Software System had been purchased by the Transport Team, which had the capacity to plot routes in a more efficient way than previous which negated to a degree, the reduction of services imposed under the MTFs. Less collection points had also been put in place at locations that were regarded as ‘safe routes to schools’, as could be deployed under the appropriate regulations.

A Member was aware of the tendering process that was followed every September for School Transport Provision. He asked if this was monitored throughout the year, in order to ensure the Authority were having value for money in terms of the Contract, for example, he hoped that buses taking young people to and from their place of education were not half empty at any time during the year.

The Head of Strategy, Partnerships and Commissioning was in total agreement with the Member on this point, and she confirmed that she would check with the Communities Directorate in order to ascertain if all, or at least most buses were fully subscribed for this purpose.

A Member asked if bus drivers could be contacted whilst driving to/from places of education in case of an emergency, or possibly for an urgent pick-up.

The Corporate Director Education and Transformation advised that at present this was something that was not in operation, and work had just been carried out in respect of the efficient planning of various routes and pick-up points along these. She felt that it may be worthwhile for Members to have a de-briefing on School Transport methods of provision, and she advised that she would take this matter up further with the Corporate Director Communities.

The Head of Strategy, Partnerships and Commissioning with regard to an earlier Member’s question, confirmed that even though consultation with young people on key services that were affected by the MTFs did take place, these had not recently been as

effective as they had previously been, with the exception of Learner Travel. Though work was ongoing to improve this, through key organisations such as the Youth Council. Such engagement was extremely important she added.

A Member who was the “Champion” on the Youth Council confirmed that he would raise this with that particular body at a future meeting, in order to look at ways of improving engagement with young people on key decisions being made by the local authority that affected them.

The Cabinet Member – Children’s Social Services and Equalities added that she was also looking at ways where young people had the opportunity to better engage with the Council on key matters, including those which directly affected them, including as part of the Overview and Scrutiny process.

The Deputy Leader confirmed that he would ensure that both the above Cabinet Member and he would meet with the Champion of the Youth Council, including at a Youth Council meeting, with the purpose of looking at methods to increase ways of engaging with young people in the County Borough.

A Member referred to CH4 and rationalising Special Education Needs (SEN) transport, and enquired as to who had been consulted on this, and what methods would be used when considering which SEN children should share transport, as there were different levels of SEN. He also asked who made the decision regarding this.

The Head of Strategy, Partnerships and Commissioning that SEN did cover a broad area in terms of an individual’s needs. An exercise had been conducted whereby Head teachers of all schools had been asked to look at ways of making efficiency savings with regard transport arrangements for children and young people. This involved children living in the same area, sharing a taxi or mini-bus to/from school. However, this had not been applied holistically, as there were different levels of SEN and the needs of individuals affected by this shared transport provision had been considered, due to any possible risk taking place as a result of their integration. Parents had also been heavily involved in this, and children affected were brought into contact with each other prior to them sharing transport, to see if there were any difficulties between them, and to allow the individuals to get used to each other. There had been no negative impacts that had arisen so far in respect of this arrangement.

A Member welcomed CH1 on page 27 of the report, i.e. Out of County budgets – reduction of Education costs by returning children with additional needs to in-house provision with additional support if required. He was concerned however, over the potential issue of the needs of children not being fully met (i.e. those with complex needs) and the risk of challenge due to this.

The Head of Strategy, Partnerships and Commissioning advised that there was a balance that needed to be met in terms of preventing legal challenge and supporting children through the correct and appropriate channels. Whilst opportunities needed to be looked to prevent children from being placed Out of County, their needs also had to be adequately supported and subsequently met. If a child is placed Out of County in order to cater for any special needs and requirements they may have, the school that places them there are automatically named as part of the necessary Statement. The Authority worked closely with both the children affected by an Out of County placement and their families, to ascertain whether or not they are ready and would like to return In County to their family. A new Education provision was being developed in Bridgend through an initiative known as ‘Bridge Alternative Provision’, where the focus concentrated more upon education and less on alternative curricula activities. This initiative also focused on

Key Stage 2 and 3, rather than older pupils, as elements of higher education were delivered in Ysgol Bryn Castell (YBC) (SEN) school.

Further avenues were being explored at YBC in terms of looking to develop an area of the school to support autistic children. This would help support the specific needs of young people who suffer from this, that were presently being supported Out of County within the neighbouring Authority of Neath/Port Talbot County Borough Council. Extra space had also been provided at the Bryncethin Special Needs Campus, to support young people with more complex needs she added.

A Member referring generally to the same area as above i.e. LAC and Out of County placements etc., appreciated that this was a very complex, difficult and expensive area of the Authority which was volatile, and where correct and sound decisions needed to be made. He noted that savings that had been identified in terms of being deliverable amounted to £200k in 2016/17. He noted though, that there was nothing identified in terms of earmarked savings as part of the MTFs for subsequent years. Neither was there any information contained in the papers he added, about approximate governable numbers of LAC or Out of County placements.

The Corporate Director Education and Transformation confirmed that in 2013, the Directorate implemented a programme for children with Additional Learning Needs (ALN), and applied to Welsh Government for funding under the School Modernisation Programme in order to provide a Special Needs Campus at Bryncethin. The reasoning behind this was that it would give the Authority more capacity in-house to cater for young people with special needs and plan to deliver a long term programme for these individuals, as oppose to looking at Out of County placements for them. This Unit had assisted in reducing children being placed Out of County, and had assisted in achieving savings for the Education Department that amounted to £50k savings in 2014/15, £200k in 2015/16 and £200k for 2016/17. Facilities such as this helped the service going forward, and made the situation regarding support for children with SEN easier to manage, as they were now more easily identified than before. This process also assisted in the development and provision of their individual Care Plans. The numbers of LAC or Out of County placements could not be accurately predicted year on year she added.

The Head of Strategy, Partnerships and Commissioning added that the Authority always had a cohort of young people that required to be placed Out of County/the Authority, some as a result of Court Orders as well as to cater for those individuals with complex needs. Numbers were decreasing though she added, with Education placements (not LAC) having reduced in recent times from 30 to 18.

The Chairperson felt that the aim for the Authority should be to further reduce the numbers of both LAC and Out of County placements, and he was aware, that some Members had aspirations for placements to be made in facilities within the County Borough, for example at Heronsbridge school, Bridgend.

A Member referred to CH2 in the papers relating to the Youth Offending Service Collaboration, and noted that there were savings (shown in amber on RAG status) amounting to £95k for 2016/17. He wondered if these indicative savings would be fully realised given that the Regional Collaboration funding had been cut, and due to the fact that we were presently working with Swansea and Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council's as part of the Western Bay project, but as part of Local Government re-organisation (LGR) proposals it looks as if BCBC would merge with Merthyr and Rhondda Cynon Taf.

The Corporate Director Education and Transformation, advised that as long as the existing collaboration with local authorities to the west of BCBC remained successful, as it was currently proving to be, there would be no requirement to abort this collaboration should BCBC merge with local authorities to the east of the County Borough.

The Deputy Leader advised that the Indicative saving for 2016-17 shown against CH2, should be showing green in the report as opposed to amber, as the original cut for this coming year was firstly set at 160k, but latterly reduced to £95k.

The Chairperson, in terms of Faith schools and those for Welsh language speakers asked if parents were still having some freedom of choice as to what schools contained in the above category, they could send their children to.

The Corporate Director Education and Transformation advised that parents would be able to exercise parental choice in respect of the above, adding that their children would also have free school transport, should they choose not to place them in the nearest Comprehensive School to where they reside.

A Member referred to page 28 of the report and SCH1, and that Cabinet had agreed in principle, that schools should be expected to find 1% efficiency savings under the MTFS, which could have an effect, in that this may result in certain schools becoming unviable, and possible facing teacher redundancies. This would in all probability, also affect the performance overall of any schools subject to such cuts including the pupil attainment. He was concerned that any teacher redundancies may result also in an increase in class sizes which would also neither benefit the school nor its pupils, and this could result in poor school inspection reports carried out by Estyn.

The Corporate Director Education and Transformation advised that performance had been as good as it's ever been across all key stages, and was above the Wales average, and though steps were being taken to look at improving performance even further, savings earmarked for Directorates under the MTFS were required to be met. Officers were consulting with Head teacher Groups and the Schools Budget Forum to examine areas where efficiency savings could most easily be met, including school clustering proposals, where schools may where possible share certain posts, such as bursars or within the area of ground maintenance. Head teachers had also been consulted on making best use of school premises, such as taking income from hiring out rooms at schools on weekends or during term times when pupils were out of school. The Central South Consortia, which was comprised of 5 local authorities, had also been working together to look at proposals to collaborate further schools where this was possible, in order to achieve increased savings. She advised that all the savings required for schools were shown as amber or red on the RAG status, as the finer details areas where these savings could be achieved, had not yet been determined. School Federations were also being approached to look at ways of working that would both make savings and raise standards of education.

The Member asked if there were any budget protection proposals going to be put in place for schools that could be classed as more 'vulnerable' than others in terms of performance and capacity etc.

The Deputy Leader confirmed that as Members would note from the report, there were due to be efficiency savings for schools in 2016-17, but these had been deferred to later years of the MTFS, as the Authority had recognised the improvements generally made across the board in school performance, and to await the outcome of the Welsh Government election, this coming May.



A Member referred to CH15, Inclusion and Additional Learning Needs and noted that the Authority had shown over the last number of years, some improvement compared to previous in this area. With the potential of redundancies/reduced staffing transpiring, she asked if we could maintain our good performance in this area.

The Head of Strategy, Partnerships and Commissioning felt that the improvement could be maintained in this service area, as the savings proposed for the coming year had been achieved, and only 2 voluntary redundancies had been made in this area.

A Member referred to CH40 and the proposal for a reduction in cost of the Central South Consortium arising from efficiencies generated from the transfer of additional services. He was concerned that the Consortia was slowly but entirely taking over the role of the local authority in terms of the supporting of schools and pupils, and the danger of this and of the local authority losing remnants of its locally retained services. Another Member supplemented this question, by asking if BCBC were receiving value for money from the Consortia, and if so, if the Committee could be provided with evidence of this.

The Corporate Director Education and Transformation, advised that a report had been completed in relation to the issue of value for money being received by participating authorities as a result of the setting-up of the Consortia, and this had been submitted to the Consortium's Joint Consultative Committee for ratification. This report could be shared with Members also she confirmed. Estyn were also due to make an inspection of the Consortia in March 2016, arising from which they would compile a report on the success or otherwise in terms of whether or not it was providing value for money. As far as she was concerned, she was convinced that this body was providing a more efficient service in terms of the Education and Transformation agenda, then any of the participating authorities would provide as stand-alone entities.

A Member referred to page 30 of the report CH22, and asked if proposals associated with the re-modelling of Childrens Respite Care would involve any staff redundancies, and if it was intended to maintain respite care support at Heronsbridge school.

The Corporate Director Social Services and Wellbeing confirmed that the provision of Respite Care for families was both essential and very important, and there were no proposals to reduce the provision of this service, as if the service collapsed, this would result in more children being placed into care. She added that this budget reduction proposal was not necessarily about looking to make staff redundancies, but more about examining whether or not existing provisions were fit for purpose, and whether through working with partners, alternative options could be provided that would result in an improvement to the service, notwithstanding the fact that savings of £200k had been earmarked for 2016-17. When all options had been considered and proposed to be put in place, these would be shared with Members in due course.

A Member referred to page 37 of the report and CS1, to rationalise and reduce voluntary sector funding by 10%. He asked if any of this proposed reduction would impact upon the Children's Directorate, and if so, in what areas.

The Deputy Leader advised that places such as Heronsbridge school, were if anything, being underutilised, though it was definitely not under performing in terms of being used for accommodation purposes, and this had been confirmed in its last inspection by Estyn where it had received an excellent report, as it delivered very positive outcomes for vulnerable young people. He added that any funding reductions proposed would not impact either, upon organisations who work with children either on behalf of or as a partnership/collaboration with the local authority.

In respect of the last part of the report, entitled Outcome of the Consultation ‘Shaping Bridgend’s Future’, a Member referred to page 46 of the report, and noted that the majority of respondents in respect of the budget consultation exercise, had been received from the older as opposed to the younger generation.

Both the Deputy Leader and the Cabinet Member Children’s Social Services and Equalities, advised that work was in progress not just in relation to the MTFs, but with regard to other public engagement exercises, in order to encourage more feedback from the younger generation of the County Borough on important topics and other Council initiatives.

As this concluded debate on the report, the Chairperson thanked the Invitees for their attendance at the meeting, and responding to Members questions, following which, they left the meeting.

## **Recommendations**

### **Learner Transport**

1. The Committee expressed concerns over the implementation of the budget cuts for Learner Transport. Members reiterated prior concerns over the apparent lack of coordination and cooperation between the Education Directorate who hold the budget for this service and the Transport Department, who are responsible for the direct provision. The Committee supported the notion of the need for proper project management of Learner Transport and recommend that this comes from outside of the two responsible areas in order to provide an objective oversight.
2. Members expressed concern over the suggestion that there was a significant reduction in the amount of pupils utilising the school transport service at the beginning of the school year and those remaining half way through and at the end of the school year. The Committee recommend that Learner Transport contracts be continually reassessed throughout the year in order that should there be any significant decrease in the numbers utilising this service, any unviable buses can be combined.
3. The Committee raised concerns over the process for retendering the bus contracts as Members reported that some bus companies hadn’t reapplied as they did not view it as a profitable contract. Members questioned the fact that the Children’s Directorate does not have any input into the tendering process and as a result, whether the Local Authority was getting the bottom end of the market in terms of Bridgend children being put on buses that are not of a quality that we would expect.
4. The Committee questioned the use of the Authorities own minibuses and the fact that they sit idle at various times throughout the day. The Committee recommend that Transport for the Authority be reviewed to consider whether changing the times of various services such as day centres, marginally, would assist in being able to utilise the Authority’s own minibuses in a more effective and efficient way and achieve further savings. Furthermore Members added that the Authority needs to look at what technology can be introduced and used to monitor where the buses are throughout the day, what they are doing and who they are picking up in order to run the service more efficiently.

### **Nursery Education**

5. The Committee raised concerns over Nursery Education provision in that funding is being used from the schools budget for provision that exceeds the statutory

requirement and encompasses children as young as 3 years of age. Members recalled the reduction proposal to go to the statutory requirement amounted to a saving of £1.5m and therefore questioned where in the schools budget this saving would come from if schools are not protected next year. The Committee recommend that this subject area be revisited both by the Directorate and the Scrutiny Committee to examine the options for future Nursery Education provision and its associated implications for schools.

6. The Committee referred to SCH1 - Agreement in principle: Cabinet have agreed that schools should be expected to find 1% efficiency savings'. Given the fact that some schools are already experiencing a deficit and issues regarding classroom sizes, the Committee recommend that the proposal be reworded to state that schools 'could', not 'should', be expected.

## **Comments**

### **Consultation**

1. The Committee referred to the proposed consultation area that was planned for development in the Civic Offices, as indicated by the Cabinet Member- Children's Social Services and Equalities, and asked that the Committee be kept fully involved with the progress of this work. Members were keen that they were notified of when things were happening and any issues feedback to them so that they could assist in addressing these.
2. The Committee expressed general concerns in relation to collaborations and partnership working particularly those under Western Bay. Members were concerned that these collaborations would not be able to continue to make savings and moreover, should Local Government reorganisation take place, these collaborations and the work underneath them will all have to be unraveled at a cost to the Authority.
3. The Committee wished to formally acknowledge their awareness of the plans for further education services previously delivered locally are to be transferred out of the Local Authority and placed under the Consortium, such as Governor Support. Members expressed concerns over this due to the Consortia being a non-elected body and having no formal democratic accountability.

### **Additional Information**

1. The Committee asked that the information promised to Cllr Watts on the reasons for the decline in LAC numbers and detail regarding the safe and planned way for this to occur be shared with all Committee Members.
2. The Committee asked for the figures in relation to Special Guardianship Orders to determine whether these were increasing.
3. Members asked for further detail in relation to the savings associated with CH3 – Retender Learner Transport Contracts, specifically:
  - a. how close were the Authority in achieving the £400,000 this year and how achievable was next year's target of 100,000k;
  - b. have any complaints been received in relation to these changes?

4. The Committee welcomed the offer from the Corporate Director – Education and Transformation to receive a briefing from a representative of the Communities Directorate on school transport contracts and how they work etc.
5. The Committee asked for further information into the Science behind the Cabinet decision, in principle, that schools should be expected to find 1% efficiency savings specifically what information the Cabinet are basing their decision on?

The Committee asked for further detail of how many schools within the County Borough were in a deficit position in order to assist them in understanding the impact of any future budget reductions.

213. URGENT ITEMS

None

The meeting closed at 4.31 pm