

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

16 FEBRUARY 2016

Present: Councillor Richard Cook (Chairperson), Councillors Boyle, Chaundy, Joyce, Morgan, Murphy, Dianne Rees and Lynda Thorne

Co-opted Members: Carol Cobert (Church in Wales representative)

67 : APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor Iona Gordon, Patricia Arlotte and Catrin Lewis.

68 : DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Chairperson reminded Members of their responsibility under Part 3 of the Members' Code of Conduct.

Personal Interests were declared in Agenda Item 3b by Councillor Dianne Rees on the basis that she is the Deputy Chair of St Mellons C.I.W Primary School; Councillor Murphy on the basis that his wife is a courier on the Ysgol Coed y Gof School Bus; and Councillor Boyle on the basis that his son has a statement of Special Educational Needs.

69 : DRAFT BUDGET PROPOSALS 2016/2017 - CORPORATE OVERVIEW

This report provided Members with an opportunity to consider those items contained in the draft Corporate Plan and draft Budgetary Proposals that fall within the responsibility of the Committee. These will be considered by Cabinet on 18th February, prior to being considered by the whole Council on 25th February. The report also detailed the changes to the draft budget post-consultation and provided details of the changes to the draft budget post-consultation and the impact of the draft budget savings proposals within Directorates.

Draft Corporate Plan and Budgetary Overview 2016/17

The Chairperson welcomed Councillor Hinchey (Cabinet Member – Corporate Services and Performance), Christine Salter (Section 151 Officer, Corporate Director – Resources), Ian Allwood (Head of Finance) and Edward Janes (Cardiff Research Centre) to the meeting.

The Chairperson the Cabinet Member to make a statement. Councillor Hinchey advised that the authority has achieved £200 million savings over the last 10 years; £99 million in the last 3 years. The forecasted budgetary gap of £45.6m has decreased due to a better than expected budget settlement from Welsh Government, however the settlement still represents a cut.

The budgetary consultation process had received 3348 responses, Councillor Hinchey advised that any amendments to the initial draft budget proposals would still ensure that the budget would focus on the Authority's 4 key priorities, namely:

- Better education and skills for all
- Supporting vulnerable people
- Creating more and better paid jobs
- Working together to transform services

Members were provided with a presentation on the Draft Corporate Plan and Budgetary Overview 2016/17.

The Chairperson invited Members to comment, raise questions and seek further clarification on the information received. Those discussions are summarised as follows:

- The Committee sought confirmation that the delegated school budget would not be less than last year; particularly bearing in mind the final settlement was more favourable than expected. The Cabinet Member stated that he was confident that it would be no less than the current figure.
- Members queried the impact of the school inflationary budgetary pressures and were advised that whilst schools needed to make efficiency savings Cardiff has the highest school delegation rate at 86.6% and that schools are in a position to utilise that money as they so wish.
- The Committee asked whether or not a per pupil funding figure could be provided for this year and Members were advised by Officers that whilst figures are provided by Welsh Government, the figures for this year will not be published until later on in the year. However, it was noted that the admission of pupil at a school did not necessarily mean an additional cost to the school but it did provide additional funding.
- Members were advised that bearing in mind some service areas had not achieved the projected savings for the year, the revised settlement figure would go some way towards making the base position less difficult.
- Members discussed the consultation process. Concern was expressed about the low level of engagement in the process as there had been a reduction in the number of responses from the 2015/16 consultation. Officers accepted that there has to be continuing review and improvement of the process.
- The Committee queried the validation process of the questions contained in the consultation document and were advised by officers that when the issues are broad, as they are in the Budget consultation, Directors and the Research Department decide on the nature of the questions. Once they are final they are not validated by any external organisation or considered by scrutiny.
- Members queried the achievability of the savings and were advised that no savings are risk free. This year there has been more work in respect of planning around the status of savings, and more communication and understanding around the savings.

The Chairperson thanked Officers and the Cabinet Member for their contribution and for their answers to Members questions.

Social Services (Children's Services)

The Chairperson welcomed Councillor Sue Lent, Cabinet Member, (Early Years, Children and Families) and Tony Young (Director, Social Services) and Angela Bourge (Operational Manager, Resources) to the meeting and a presentation on the Social Services budget proposals 2016/17 was delivered.

The Chairperson invited Members to comment, raise questions and seek further clarification on the information received. Those discussions are summarised as follows:

- Members queried the restructure of the Social Work Teams and whether that would mean any increase in the number of Social Workers. The Director advised that the agency base was being eroded which was likely to mean there would be 4 further Social Worker posts. Also, that the deletion of two posts referred to in line 41 of Appendix 5 were not Social Worker posts.
- Members queried the savings in relation to the Enhanced Foster Scheme. Officers advised that they still believed in the delivery model.
- The Committee queried the plans put in place to achieve the savings referred to as red/amber in the Risk Analysis in Appendix 8:
 - 1) Lines 134/136 – Officers advised they were confident that the savings were realistic and achievable but as the red/amber ratings indicate the service is not in control of all the variables or factors or other partners involved;
 - 2) Line 135 – Officers advised premises still have to be identified and there are still difficulties in identifying carers;
 - 3) Line 137 – Officers advised the savings are speculative, the national evidence base suggests that the savings will be achievable it does not take into account the individuality of each child's circumstances;
 - 4) Line 138 – Officers advised that the restructure of the teams is changing the approach in relation to how social work is delivered with families.
- The Director advised that he is confident that there are robust plans in place to ensure the achievability of the savings referred to and that the Committee will have the opportunity to scrutinise those the Social Services Business Plan which contain the separate detailed plans.
- Members were particularly concerned about the achievability of savings, referred to in Line 146 of Appendix 8. The Director advised that £1.2m was spent on legal costs in the previous year and that costs were increasing year on year. The intention is to reduce external legal costs and it was noted that previously staff capacity and expertise had been an issue. Members were advised however that £158k of the financial pressures bid would be spent on legal support for child protection issues.

Members expressed some concern about the spending on plans that the Members had been unable to scrutinise and wanted reassurance that there had been robust detailed discussions with Directors. The Corporate Director advised the Committee that there is an Investment Review Board within the Authority, consideration of those plans has been carried out at those meetings. Whilst accepted there is a risk Directorates have indicated their intention to work hard to ensure the success of those plans and achievability of the savings. It was made clear that the problems of the fostering initiative were due to the failure of the provider to deliver and the procurement process has been adjusted.

- Members were advised by the Cabinet Member that training is to be arranged in relation to the Corporate Parenting and Early Help Strategies.

The Chairperson thanked Officers and the Cabinet Member for their contribution and for their answers to Members questions.

Education

The Chairperson welcomed Councillor Sarah Merry (Cabinet Member - Education), Nick Batchelar (Director – Education and Lifelong Learning), and Neil Hardee (Head of Performance Resources and Services for Education) to the meeting and a presentation on the Education budget proposals 2016/17 was delivered.

The Chairperson invited Members to comment, raise questions and seek further clarification on the information received. Those discussions are summarised as follows:

- Members were advised that the Welsh Government provides current and historical statistical data in relation to current delegated budget pupil spending. The average in Cardiff is £4742 and across Wales is £4629. Members noted that in Cardiff the total delegated school budget increased by 2.8% against a Welsh average of 0.2% in 2015/16.
- Members queried the ability of schools to increase pupil numbers when they are performing well and there is demand for places. Officers advised that the objective is to ensure that all schools are considered good schools and that consequently all places are filled as opposed to there being oversubscription in some schools.
- Members commented that new housing developments have an impact on schools and this needs to be tied up with the LDP.
- Members queried the plans in place and time scales for achievement in relation to budget lines referred to as red/amber in the risk analysis in Appendix 8 which related to Out of County Placements. Officers provided a breakdown of the savings proposals; £680,000 reduction in the number of new placements, £100,000 reduction in the number of Looked After Children placed Out of County and £130,000 reduction in the number of placements with other Local Authorities. Members were advised that there is consultation between Directorates in relation to Out of County Placements.

- Members discussed Healthy and Safety issues relative to schools and were advised that the Council has agreed a partnership Health and Safety Model with Caerphilly County Borough Council.
- Officers advised Members that the responsibility for Health and Safety remains with the school and governing body however where Health and Safety issues could result in the closure of the school funds could be prioritised to address those issues.
- Members were concerned to establish whether or not the budget reductions referred to would have an adverse effect on already vulnerable children and made specific reference to the reduction in funding for out of county placements; the consultation in relation to the proposed closure of Meadowbank Special School and the restructure of Specialist SEN teams. Officers advised that the casework team processes applications for statements of Special Educational Needs and there are no plans to reduce capacity in that team; the consultation in relation to Meadowbank Special School is ongoing and only a small piece of the jigsaw. Costs will be revisited and do not impact on the overall financial burden; and it is believed that savings can be made in relation to out of county placements but not at the cost of an individual child.
- Members were concerned to note the reduction in the percentage of young people in Cardiff achieving a recognised qualification by the end of Year 11 and asked about plans for improvement. Officers advised that the authority had stepped in, because of poor performance, in schools in the West and East of the City. Work is ongoing to maintain and extend the existing apprenticeship scheme and the traineeship scheme and also partnership working is also ongoing with Cardiff and Vale College aimed at 14 – 16 year olds who are at risk of becoming NEET. Members were advised of the involvement of local businesses such as Admiral and Panasonic in these schemes.
- In relation to the reduction of costs for the Education of children not in school officers advised Members that they are monitoring schemes in place to ensure that the new delivery model for tuition would not have a detrimental effect upon those pupils.

The Chairperson also welcomed Andrew Gregory (Director, City Operations) and Stephen Gerard (Passenger Transport Manager) to the meeting and to provide a presentation on the School Transport draft budget proposals.

The Chairperson invited Members to comment, raise questions and seek further clarification on the information received. Those discussions are summarised as follows:

- Members discussed the provision of school transport for Faith and Welsh schools and the policy of other authorities. Whilst it was noted that it could potentially raise equality issues the Committee advised Officers that they felt that there should be a debate as to whether or not that provision should continue.

The Chairperson thanked Officers and the Cabinet Member for their contribution and for their answers to Members questions.

City Operations (Play Service)

The Chairperson welcomed Councillor Peter Bradbury (Cabinet Member - Community Development, Co-operatives & Social Enterprise), Andrew Gregory (Director, City Operations) and Jane Clemence (Active Communities Officer) to the meeting and a presentation on the City Operations (Play Service) budget proposals 2016/17 was delivered.

The Chairperson invited Members to comment, raise questions and seek further clarification on the information received. Those discussions are summarised as follows:

- The Committee discussed the delivery model for play services which, if delivered, would result in a saving of £270,000. Officers advised that the current provision would continue until such times as the Community Asset Transfers had taken place, although that provision may well be provided at different venues. Officers advised that any building work would take place prior to any transfers.

The Chairperson thanked Officers and the Cabinet Member for their contribution and for their answers to Members questions.

AGREED – That, the Chairperson on behalf of the Committee writes to relevant Cabinet Members, Directors and Officers thanking them for attending the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee on 16 February 2016 and to convey the observations of the Committee when discussing the way forward.

70 : DRAFT CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION STRATEGY

Martyn Hutchings (Principal Scrutiny Officer) introduced the Task & Finish Inquiry comments.

AGREED – To inform the Director of the outcome of the inquiry.

71 : DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The date of the next regular meeting of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee is 15 March 2016 at 4.30 pm.