

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

28 FEBRUARY 2023

Present: Councillor Bridgeman(Chairperson)
Councillors Boes, Davies, Ferguson-Thorne, Hopkins,
Melbourne and Simmons

47 : APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Emily Gao.

48 : DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were received.

49 : MINUTES

The minutes of the meetings held on 13 December 2022 and 16 January 2023 were approved as a correct record.

50 : DRAFT CORPORATE PLAN 2023 - 2026 & DRAFT BUDGETARY PROPOSALS 2023 - 2024

Members were advised that they were being provided with an opportunity to consider those items in the Draft Corporate Plan and Draft Budgetary Proposals which fall within the responsibilities of the Committee, prior to them being considered by the Cabinet and the Council.

The Chair advised Members that they would receive a briefing from the Corporate Overview of draft Budget Proposals. The Budget proposals and relevant parts of the Corporate Plan would be considered in three parts: Children's Services relevant to Cllr Lister's portfolio; Education, relevant to Cllr Merry's portfolio; and Supporting Young People, relevant to Cllr Bradbury's portfolio.

Corporate Overview:

The Chair welcomed Cllr Chris Weaver, Cabinet Member for Finance, Modernisation and Performance; Chris Lee, Corporate Director, Resources; Ian Allwood, Head of Finance, Resources; and Tom Crocker-Wilton and Eifion Austin, Finance Officers to the meeting.

Cllr Weaver made a statement, in which he provided an overview of the Corporate Plan and Budget Proposals.

Ian Allwood provided a presentation, which included details of the savings and other financial measures required to meet the expected shortfall in the Council's revenue and the impact of inflation on the Council's spending.

Members were invited to ask questions and make comments; the discussion is summarised as follows:

Members were advised on the steps being undertaken to reduce overspending on services. Spending has been monitored periodically through the year and the predicted overspend at month 9 was nearly half that at month 6, with a balanced position expected at the end of the year. Costs have grown significantly in a number of service areas and due to rising demand in areas such as Children's Services and school transport, and the £10 million Covid contingency fund has been used to meet areas of overspend.

Members sought information on the settlement for education and whether it would be sufficient. Officers advised that the overall settlement for schools was increased by 9.3% and that the allocations to individual schools would be decided on a formula basis. Only 5 schools are in deficit which is fewer than other LAs. A £2.5 million extra contribution was put in to support schools at month 9, but funds for the teacher's pay award will have to come out of the money allocated.

Members sought assurance that the level of risk in the Children's Services settlement was manageable. Officers advised that £8.12 million was being allocated to Children's Services to deal with rising demand, in addition to contingency reserves, and this provides some financial resilience. Members were assured that the budget proposals are robust and deliverable.

Members discussed the cessation of £41 million worth of grants and the fact that £32 million of grants are yet to be confirmed. Officers advised that some of the grants were now going direct rather than being handed on. Grants are always a challenge, some directorates are also very heavily reliant on them; planning is also made difficult because Welsh Government to not provide information other for about 12 months ahead.

Members discussed the consultation and the number of responses provided; whilst low when considering the population it was a high response for Cardiff budget consultations. It is always a challenge. It is weighted to reflect the city's population. The Committee were advised that it was only one element of the consultation and that whilst it would be better for everybody to complete the survey it is a good performance and response rate for this kind of consultation. The reason behind the consultation taking place when it did was explained to Members. Normally speaking the consultation would run through November and December, however, as the provisional budget settlement figures were not provided by Welsh Government until late December the consultation ran from 23 December, as soon as it was possible, until the end of January, but with further communications being released at the beginning of January. Members were advised that all councils across Wales receive the provisional budget settlement figures at the same time. The release of the figure was delayed in 2019 because of the general election and Covid also caused a delay. It also has to mirror financial announcements from Westminster.

Members sought clarification as to the amount of money held in unallocated reserves and were advised it was approximately £14.1m.

Members were advised that information in relation to the 5 schools in deficit would be provided in writing to the Committee.

Members asked for information in relation to the revaluation of Council tax and were advised that there has been a preliminary consultation with local authorities, it will be monitored closely as the impact of any change in valuation bands will have a direct impact in terms of funding from Welsh Government.

Members discussed the level of council tax rises throughout Wales; Cardiff's will be 3.95% which will be at the lower end of rises throughout Wales. The Vale of Glamorgan have announced 4.9%, Newport closer to 8% but RCT is lower at 3.5%, Torfaen is also lower.

Members queried the funding of Youth Officer posts this year and whether because of the reduction in funding this year will other sources of funding need to be found to cover those posts. The Cabinet Member advised that funding has not been withdrawn the use of the financial resilience mechanism is only ever awarded on a one off basis; last year there was an increase in the base budget for youth services as well. The FRM cannot be relied on for long-term planning. It can however be used to bridge a gap in funding.

Children's Services

The Chair welcomed Cllr Ashley Lister, Cabinet Member for Social Services, Children's; Sarah McGill, Corporate Director, People and Communities and Director of Social Services; and Deborah Driffield, Director of Children's Services, to the meeting.

Cllr Lister made a statement, in which he outlined some of the budget proposals for the coming year, advising that the proposed budget for Children's Services is £89.9m which reflects inflationary pressures and budget realignments and equates to a growth of around 12.6% after some corporate savings.

Members were invited to ask questions and make comments; the discussion is summarised as follows:

Members asked whether or not the targets that have been set are realistic and achievable in relation to the Youth Justice Service and whether they should be more ambitious. The new targets have been set by the Youth Justice Board for England and Wales; some of the wording may need refining.

Members confirmed that the budget uplift was £9.8m and queried whether, on the basis that with that uplift, the practice of placing under 16's in unregistered and unregulated care settings will stop. The Cabinet Member stressed the importance of ensuring that any accommodation that a younger person is placed in is as suitable as possible, sometimes that means it is unregistered but it does not mean that it is unregulated – the level of oversight in those settings is very high. The Director advised that the increase will help to increase in-house accommodation, that cannot be done quickly as they have to be adapted and ready to be registered and staff have to be brought in. All local authorities are having difficulties in bringing in Manager for their Local Authority provision.

Members referred to the nationwide figure of how many children are currently looked after by the local authority and waiting to be adopted, and queried whether the

budget will be used to address the issue of not enough adoptive parents going through the system. The Director advised there is a Regional Adoption Service, it no longer sits in Cardiff and she is not aware of the issues referred to; however, the issue is probably the support that is available to those families. The children being adopted at the moment are different from those a number of years ago; adopters need to be able to tap into the various therapies and support for those children and for themselves.

Reference was made to the £1.28m in efficiency savings and whether it will be possible to deliver on all of them. Officers advised that they are confident, time has been spent working it through for example in respect of special guardians – which is almost as good as adoption and Ty Storrie and being able to deliver far more bed nights.

The Committee sought information in relation to the new trusted adult model and whether part of that was to recruit non-qualified staff in order to free up social worker time as there are difficulties in recruiting new social care practitioners. Members were advised that the difficulties in social worker recruitment and retention is a national problem, Welsh Government are being pushed to create the progression, pay and conditions framework so it is more appealing. It would be new staff, not just shifting staff around. It is part and parcel of a much bigger recruitment and retention plan.

Members asked about the increased activities for children looked after and those on the edge of care; it is important to make the best use of the money, particularly to maintain placements and make sure that young people get the best outcomes.

Officers were asked whether, given the range of pressures and changes being made as to how the service operates, whether the additional revenue support allocation of £9.7m met expectations. Members were advised that the additional funding is now allowing investment in prevention; for the first time the service is starting to look at actual financial modelling and taking money from one area and investing in another.

Members referred to the directorate efficiency savings proposal and in particular the use of Ty Storrie to support bespoke packages. Members queried the cost of that and from where the additional support will come. Members were advised that historically Ty Storrie wasn't ever at full occupancy, so it's about reducing the cost that we have. The Director explained that they are trying to use it in a far more flexible way, so some families might appreciate just a bit of a break at teatime. It's about thinking much more creatively and flexibly and making better use of our resources. So in terms of the cost for that they have increased; there is a new manager; there has been an increase in staffing levels; and we just have gone out to consultation about changing the shifts, to make them more family friendly, both for the service users and for those who work there who wanted to change their shift patterns.

Members queried exactly what is the locality working model and how will the integration of the CAD teams within this model work. It was explained that locality working, when dealing with children with disabilities and complex health needs, it is about providing services within our localities, to make better use of what is going on

in their communities rather than just paying for services; for example schools, health services and the not-for-profit sector.

Members referred to the 20% difference in children looked after in placements in Cardiff and those who are within neighbouring authorities – out of county children and queried whether that was a national average. The Director advised that it was more difficult in Cardiff as there were less providers willing to come and set up in Cardiff as it is more expensive. There is an advanced plan in place to bring children back to Cardiff because the Council is creating its own provision; regular meetings take place with both education and health to make sure that the correct provision is in places because the children do have complex needs and it is not as simple as moving house.

Members also queried, when looking at KPI's 127 and 128 the new target of 60, what the cohort number was. Members were advised that that would be put into the letter.

Members queried the retention of social worker targets, it is now 24% the previous target was 18%. The target has now been set to be more manageable.

Education and Lifelong Learning

The Chair welcomed Cllr Sarah Merry, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Education; Melanie Godfrey, Director of Education and Lifelong Learning; Deborah Driffield, Director of Children's Services; Richard Portas, Programme Director, Schools Organisation Planning; Suzanne Scarlett, Operational Manager, Partnerships, Performance, Education and Lifelong Learning; and Neil Hardee, Head of Services to Schools, to the meeting.

Cllr Merry made a statement, in which she referred to the themes contained within the Corporate Plan, such as becoming a Child Friendly City, supporting education recovery post pandemic and continuing to deliver the Cardiff 2030 vision for education and learning; and the additional funding of £25 m going into the delegated schools budgets.

Members were invited to ask questions and make comments; the discussion is summarised as follows:

Members queried the implications that may arise should the pay award be above 6%. The Director advised that there are currently a number of unknowns however the increased settlement for education budget is welcome. It is front loaded and it is financial support that will be going into the education system. With reference to the 6% pay award if there is any additional to that agreed by Welsh government through their negotiations over the next weeks or months clearly we'll be looking to Welsh government to make good any shortfall. Schools in Cardiff and across Wales really started this financial year in a very healthy position, but that they were going to eat significantly in those balances.

Members discussed the massive impact of the pandemic on attendance figures and the challenge faced in getting children back into school.

Members asked about the equality impact assessments (EIA) carried out prior to the 5% increase in school meals; believing that the increase will be unpopular. Officers advised that there has been a £1.4 m overspend on school meals, that is before the impact of the pay award is known. Food costs have also risen by 150%. The Council this year is proposing a budgetary alignment for school meals that will in effect provide a level of subsidy for the school meal service which is not there at the present time. There will be a full EIA now the price increase is known, that increase will be mitigated by the introduction of universal free school meals for primary age children. It is noted that in Cardiff only 67% of the children actually take up that free school meal and that is reflective of our national picture. Members sought clarification as to whether Welsh Government provides the money for the free school meals or whether schools provide the meals and then recoup it from Welsh Government. Members were advised that it is allocated within the Revenue Support Grant (RSG), prior to the pandemic there were 11,000 children eligible for free school meals, that had risen to 16,500 by the end of the pandemic. The RSG was increased to reflect that.

In relation to the increase in prices at Ty Storrie, Members queried whether the increase was per child and whether there was any support available for parents to ensure that children can go there. Members were advised that, like free school meals and the music service they are all traded functions within education. In this financial year there is no subsidy from the council for any of those services, so whatever it costs has to be matched income received. The increases are necessary.

Members were pleased to see the increase in the education budget noting the need to redress the balance and shift funding policy attention to younger generations after the pandemic, otherwise there will not be a recovery. Members noted the schools budget is protected from efficiency savings and queried whether that means that the Cabinet feels there's no waste at all in this area, because some of the consultation responses actually suggested that that was not the case. The Cabinet Member indicated that what is required is that the money that is put into education benefits children and young people going through school. Schools must continue to look at what they are doing and how they can do it in the most efficient manner. Officers also advised that there are 127 schools, each school, on the 1st of April, will receive a delegated budget. That delegated budget, on the 1st of April 23, will aggregate some 290 million pounds. Each individual school has got the responsibility and the delegated powers to set their own budgets. All 127 schools will make different decisions. It is important to note that there is a distinction between whether or not schools could find efficiencies and the needs of its pupils and the needs of young people, especially coming out of Covid. Children and young people have paid a high price over the last few years in terms of the impact on their education.

Youth Services, Play Services and Youth Engagement

The Chair welcomed Cllr Peter Bradbury, Cabinet Member for Tackling Poverty and Supporting Young People; Melanie Godfrey, Director, Education and Lifelong Learning, Suzanne Scarlett, Operational Manager, Partnerships, Performance, Education and Lifelong Learning; Steve Morris, Operational Manager, Sport, Leisure

and Development, Economic Development, and Sarah Stork, Leisure Client Services Manager, Economic Development, to the meeting.

Cllr Bradbury made a statement, in which he outlined the key commitments in the Corporate plan. The Youth Budget has increased by £125,000, the core budget has stayed the same; the FRM funding has been increased by £125,000, the shared prosperity funding has been increased by £125,000, however £125,000 has been lost through the social fund. In play services there has been one saving of £57,000 – its an efficiency saving which will be replaced by grant funding.

Members queried the plans for expanding the facilities for young people, particularly young vulnerable young people where the economic situation is difficult. At the moment a review is taking place of all the facilities available throughout the city and trying to create links with schools; youth mentors going into schools; and working with partners to put on activities which are tailored towards traditional youth services which can create the proper link between education and the youth service. Young people are also being canvassed about what they want and the links that can be created to help them make the right choices in life and do not become susceptible to the dark paths that can be take. There is also a new initiative 'Passport to the City' which will allow us to identify any groups of children and young people who may miss out on opportunities, they can then be targeted and enable them to access activities free of charge and thereafter engage them in a wider programme of activity.

Members referred to the earmarked reserves general fund and the fact that the amount for youth services has fallen by over a quarter for the next year, and asked whether that was because the amount in this financial year to the next has been spent already or had it been reallocated to other areas of spending.

The Cabinet Member advised that there has been a reallocation of funding through the shared prosperity fund as the European social fund has ended. There is £125,000 increase and the shared prosperity fund is guaranteed for two years. Officers advised that the youth service budgets for next year are adequate in order to meet the needs being dealt with at the moment. Opportunities are also being explored to create more activity and youth work offer for young people through collaboration. The shared prosperity fund has enabled us to continue at the level we had last year with a little bit extra.

Members discussed the budget figures currently, and those from 2015 and felt that it is important that there should be a move away from looking at grants and look at getting money into the core budget so we can look at sustainable growth and development. That is a challenge.

Officers advised that Welsh Government have just set up five task and finish groups to look at the Youth Work Strategy for Wales and the funding of youth work in Wales. We are watching with interest and participating in some of those task and finish groups.

Members referred officers to the efficiency savings in the education budget and the reference to £40,000 being saved by aligning the budget of the Youth Service, Cardiff Commitment and the child-friendly cities teams and increase the use of external funding sources. Members queried in these circumstances what does align budgets

actually mean. Officers advised that whilst those three areas each have their own unique identity, they do have some areas of work which compliment each other, and now it is important to ensure that those three areas of service work together effectively to get more value for money out of the combined three areas.

Members sought information about the City Centre Hub and where advised that it sits within a different portfolio in the Corporate Plan, however there has been a request to contribute.

Members asked for some details in relation to the review into play services and were advised that it was part of the overall review, it is likely to move directorate to Communities. Play and Youth Services should work together as should Play and Education, but there is a strong community involvement particularly in relation to advice; there is a closer synergy that was realised.

RESOLVED:

That the Chairperson writes to the Cabinet Member on behalf of the Committee expressing their comments and observations captured during the way forward.

51 : URGENT ITEMS (IF ANY)

No urgent items were received.

52 : WAY FORWARD

Members discussed the information received and identified a number of issues which the Chairman agreed would be included in the letters that would be sent, on behalf of the Committee, to the relevant Cabinet Members and Officers.

53 : DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting will be held on Monday 20 March 2023 at 5.00pm.

The meeting terminated at 8.15 pm