

# CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

13 FEBRUARY 2018

Present: Councillor Bridgeman (Chairperson),  
Councillors Joyce, Phillips, Taylor and Singh

Co-opted Members: Carol Cobert (Church in Wales representative)  
and Karen Dell'Armi (Parent Governor Representative)

## 1 : APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for Absence have been received from Patricia Arlotte, Rebecca Crump and Councillors De'Ath, Phillipa Hill-John and Morgan.

## 2 : DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were received.

## 3 : DRAFT BUDGET PROPOSALS 2018/19

### **Corporate Overview**

The Chairperson welcomed Councillor Weaver (Cabinet Member for Finance, Modernisation and Performance, and Ian Allwood (Head of Finance) to the meeting.

The Chairperson invited Councillor Weaver to make a statement in which he said that this had been a particularly difficult budget to set, however Schools and Social Services had both seen an increase in their budgets.

Ian Allwood provided Members with a presentation and highlighted various issues:

- Final Settlement Overview;
- Consultation with specific reference to the three investment priorities;
- Draft Revenue Budget;
- Medium Term Outlook; and
- Draft Capital Programme

Members were invited to comment, seek clarification or raise questions on the information received. Those discussions are summarised as follows:

- In terms of addressing the Medium Term Gap, Members questioned the achievability of the proposed savings over the next 2 – 3 years and the areas in which it was intended those savings would be made. Officers advised that the proposals for Social Services in 2019/20 are currently being considered; there is a need to manage demand and assumptions have to be made based on the predicted growth of the population. If services can meet the demand this will in turn reduce the budget gap. Increased digitalisation will also help to reduce the cost of service delivery.
- Members sought clarification of whether or not digitalisation would impact on the net FTE reduction of 24.19 posts and were advised that it will impact on all

areas of the Council and will also help to bridge the gap particularly where there are significant budgets.

- In relation to the overview of the Revenue Budget, Members queried the £6.2 million Red/Red-Amber residual risk, and asked for information about which service areas were affected. Officers advised that Social Services and Education would be affected and that more detailed information is contained in the full budget report.
- Members raised concerns about the consultation process and the responses received - They felt that the methodology was broad and queried whether the profile of respondents matched the profile of the people of Cardiff and whether the 3 priorities were identified as a result of a straight forward count or whether they were weighted in any way. Officers agreed that the consultation process appears weighted towards those aged 55+ and living in the North of the City and that often responses are not received from those of different age groups and from different areas of the City.

## **Social Services**

The Chairperson welcomed Councillor Graham Hinchey (Cabinet Member Children and Families), Tony Young (Director of Social Services) Irfan Alam (Assistant Director, Children's Services), Ian Allwood (Head of Finance and Alan Evans (Operational Manager – Accountancy) to the meeting.

The Chairperson invited the Cabinet Member to make a statement in which he outlined the difficult budgetary challenges facing the Directorate given the complex needs of children in local authority care and the growing numbers of children in the city.

Tony Young and Irfan Alam provided Members with a presentation on the Social Services budget which covered the following:

- Budget Overview;
- Additional Allocations;
- Accepted Specific Pressures;
- Savings Proposals for Children's Services;
- Savings Proposals for Adult Services;
- Approach to Budget Challenges; and
- Financial Outlook

Members were invited to comment, seek clarification or raise questions on the information received. Those discussions are summarised as follows:

- Members queried whether the £3.99m re-alignment in the Social Services Budget related specifically to an overspend on out of county placements in this current year and were advised that it related to pressures in both Adult and Children's Services. Officers advised that there has been an increase in the number of children in local authority care over the last 12 months. Members had been advised that the estimated number of children in looked after children in March 2019 will be 920. The Director explained that the projected figures were based the trend in November 2016 and it is anticipated that the figures will continue to increase until 2021-22 when the momentum will turn.

- Members inquired whether the projected increase in numbers had been built into the budget. Officers advised that the approach taken is to fully realign the budget. The overspend has been caused due to the number of children entering local authority care and that there was also a contingency for Children's Services of £950,000.
- Members queried whether the contingency amount is too low and is therefore an added pressure. The Director confirmed that there is no indifference to the overspend, there is concern about the growth in costs of looking after children and that the growth in costs is unsustainable. It is important to ensure that only those children that need to be cared are cared for; Members were advised that £2.5m has been saved by returning children to their families where appropriate. Councillor Hinchey advised that if nothing changes the realignment figure of £3.99m is correct however, the contingency figure has not been amended for the last 3 years.
- Members queried the achievability of the saving of £680,000 in respect of out of county placements and also queried the number of children who will benefit from the opening of the new children's home. Officers believe that the savings were realistic. The new home, which is not owned or operated by the Council, has places for 3 children and those 3 children are being identified at the present time. It is important to note, when bearing in mind the costs of funding residential placements, that it only needs 2 or 3 children to be brought back to Cardiff to reach those savings.
- Members asked whether the new children's home will focus on provision not currently provided by Cardiff. Officers stated that the saving is not predicated just on the children's home, officers have identified a number of children who, at the end of the academic year, can be return to Cardiff.

## **Education**

The Chairperson welcomed Councillor Merry (Deputy Leader and Cabinet member – Education, Employment and Skills), Nick Batchelar (Director Education and Lifelong Learning) Neil Hardee (Head of Performance Resources and Services for Education), Ian Allwood (Head of Finance) and Robert Green (Group Accountant) to the meeting.

The Chairperson invited the Cabinet Member to make a statement, in which she indicated that whilst additional sums have been made available for schools, that amount does still not meet all the financial pressures.

The Director provided a brief statement in which he wished to remind members of the priorities in the Corporate Plan as they relate to the Education Directorate, referring to the additional funding asset renewal programme and the additional funding for ALN provision.

Neil Hardee (Head of Performance Resources and Services for Education) provided Members with a presentation outlining a number of points:

- Corporate Plan;
- Revenue Budget;

- Capital Budget;
- Schools Delegated Budget; and
- Grants

Members were invited to comment, seek clarification or raise questions on the information received. Those discussions are summarised below:

- Members referred to the 30% cap on schools growth and school budget deficits. Officers advised that overall Cardiff schools are carrying over a positive balances. On the whole primary schools have positive balances whilst secondary schools are in deficit. A team of officers is assigned to work closely with each school to address deficit balances; to look at financial management and to work towards setting a medium financial plan. Officers advised that the loss of Post 16 funding will impact on secondary schools.
- In terms of the Capital budget, Members sought clarification as how the £1.300m for Whitchurch DDA works is to be spent and whether other schools requiring DDA works will be addressed. Officers advised that Whitchurch has a large specialist resource base and a large number of children with Additional Learning Needs (ALN). Work needs to be undertaken to make Whitchurch more DDA compliant. Money was available in the Asset and Suitability budget to improve DDA accessibility in other schools.
- Members referred to the large amount of additional borrowing needed to match Band B funding from Welsh Government and queried how the decision about borrowing is made. Officers advised that a basket of borrowing over the whole Council is considered, and whilst borrowing is increasing the Section 151 officer considers that resilience going forward remains affordable. It is important that investment is where required.
- Members noted the growing pressure on schools due to demographic changes in existing wards, and that secondary schools will be oversubscribed by 2019. Officers advised that with the new developments as referred to in the LDP Section 106 monies will be generated which in turn will be used for building new schools in those areas and that whilst 2019/20 will be a pinch-point year, Band B will be in place then to help ease the pressure.
- Members highlighted the £200,000 savings target for staff in central teams and questioned how this will be managed, as schools are still in need of support. Officers explained that there has been significant staffing cuts but they have been balancing the roles. The savings are achievable, and whilst it would have been preferable not to have made the cuts officers are satisfied that they can be made and that the necessary functions can still be discharged.

## **School Transport**

The Chairperson welcomed Steve Gerrard (Network Operations Team Leader) to the meeting. Members were provided with a presentation outlining the draft budget proposals:

- Revenue Controllable Budget 2018/19 figures;

- Supported financial pressures;
- Savings Proposals – Income Generation and review of External spend;
- Key Challenges; and
- Next Steps

Members were invited to comment, seek clarification or raise questions on the information received. Those discussions are summarised as follows:

- Members expressed concern in relation to the Travel Support Allowance which will see parents paid directly to transport their child to school, namely that funds provided would be used for the purpose intended, the impact on the environment with potentially more vehicles on the road, and whether the savings would be achievable. Members were advised that parents would be paid termly and the amount would be based on attendance. If attendance does not meet satisfactory levels the payments will be stopped. It is anticipated that around 150 parents will move across to that system, and it was also acknowledged that that would potentially impact the environment. Members sought clarification as to whom excess seats on the school buses are sold. Officers explained that they were offered to those pupils who are not eligible for free transport. It equates to approximately 200 pupils. There is to be a reduction in the subsidy for school bus places.
- Members queried the saving of £27,000 and were advised that it will be made as a result of reviewing transport for all statemented pupils, with the review being undertaken on a case by case basis.
- Members asked whether the transport savings would impact on those pupils eligible for free school meals (eFSM). Members were advised that transport is not means tested at the present time, and Officers are currently looking at options surrounding eFSM. The costs of travelling to school on the bus is more than the cost of their school meal and effects on attendance is being noticed.
- Members expressed concern about the travel arrangements to Llanishen High School and raised a number of issues:
  - Most of the buses do not have seatbelts;
  - Buses are often full with many children having to stand;
  - Vehicles are considered not fit for purpose;
  - Requests for CCTV footage of incidents are not dealt with in a timely fashion.
- Members were advised that there have been meetings with the Headteacher of Llanishen High School and NAT to discuss the various issues. Members queried the cost of school transport places and were advised that NAT charge £420 over 7 months which is a lessor amount than transport provided by the Council, and the payment options provided by NAT are more flexible. NAT buses are commercial services and as such the council is not able to interfere with the fare rates or options that NAT decide to set for the services.
- Members queried how those taxi drivers who transport pupils with ALN are both monitored and paid, and were advised that payment was made on a

monthly basis. As far as monitoring is concerned the team carry out spot checks and speak to teachers and parents. They also consider the attendance records of the various pupils.

AGREED – That the Chairperson, on behalf of the Committee, writes to the Cabinet Members conveying the observations of the Committee when discussing the Way Forward.

#### 4 : CHILDS PLAY

The Chairperson welcomed Councillor Bradbury (Cabinet Member – Culture & Leisure) Jon Maidment (Operational Manager Parks and Sport), and Ian Allwood (Head of Finance) to the meeting.

The Chair invited the Cabinet Member to make a brief statement in which he advised Members that the savings proposals are achievable with the reduction in FM costs and the loss of posts; there are two vacant posts and one being deleted as a result of voluntary severance.

Members were invited to comment, seek clarification or raise questions on the information received. Those discussions are summarised as follows:

- Members were advised that there has been and will not be any impact from the loss of posts.
- Members were reassured that Childrens Play would remain in the same Directorate. Cabinet would like to see closer interaction and future integration with Youth Services with a view to creating a pathway of play for those aged between 0 and 17.
- Members were advised that no major cuts to Children's Play are planned. Further the future of Children's play is in the sharing of resources with others to deliver the service effectively. Ely play centre is a positive model for that.
- Members were advised that there is potential for both the Youth Services and the Children's Play service operating from the same building in Llanrumney.
- Members queried the projects at Ely Church Hall and referenced the funding and expertise. Officers advised that the play workers themselves have the expertise and that if there are other projects that could be used for Children's play and would benefit from the expertise, for example the community garden project in Fairwater, consideration would be given to providing that expertise. Members were reassured that staff were enjoying the new model of working across different venues and would be prepared to attend a scrutiny meeting to share their views.
- Members were reassured that agency staff is only used for play services in cases of long term sickness absence.
- Members were relieved to note that the new model was operating well, particularly bearing in mind the issues experienced initially.

AGREED – That the Chairperson, on behalf of the Committee, writes to the Cabinet Member conveying the observations of the Committee when discussing the Way Forward.

5 : 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.

6 : DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee is on Tuesday 13 March 2018 at 4:30pm.

***This document is available in Welsh / Mae'r ddogfen hon ar gael yn Gymraeg.***

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