

**These minutes are draft and are subject to approval as an accurate record at the next meeting of the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee to be held on 10 March 2015**

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

3 FEBRUARY 2015

Present: Councillor Richard Cook (Chairperson), Councillors Boyle, Chaundy, Gordon, Govier, Morgan, Murphy, Dianne Rees and Thorne.

Co-opted Members: Mrs P. Arlotte (Roman Catholic representative), plus three vacancies.

Apologies:

58: DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Chairperson reminded Members of their responsibility under Part III of the Members' Code of Conduct to declare any interest in general terms and to complete personal interest forms at the start of the meeting and then, prior to the commencement of the discussion of the item in question, specify whether it is a personal or prejudicial interest. If the interest is prejudicial Members would be asked to leave the meeting and if the interest is personal, Members would be invited to stay, speak and vote. The following declarations were made:

<i>Councillor/Co-opted Member</i>	<i>Item</i>	<i>Interest</i>
<i>Govier</i>	<i>Item 4c – Children's Services – Budget Proposals</i>	<i>Personal – Cllr Govier's partner works for Barnardos</i>
<i>Murphy</i>	<i>Item 4b – Schools Transport – Budget Proposals</i>	<i>Personal – Cllr Murphy's wife is a courier on a bus to Coed-Y-Gof</i>

59: DRAFT CORPORATE PLAN AND DRAFT BUDGET CONSULTATION PROPOSALS 2015/16

The purpose of this report was to provide Members with context for the scrutiny of the sections of the Council's draft Corporate Plan 2015 – 17 and draft Cabinet 2015/16 Budget Consultation Proposals that relate to Directorates falling within the remit of this Committee.

Prior to consideration of this item, the Chair certified that the Budget Consultation Report, which had been circulated to Members the afternoon before the meeting, could be considered as urgent business. Hard copies of the report were furnished for Members' information during the meeting.

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a) Draft Budget Consultation Proposals 2015/16 - Corporate Overview

The Chairperson welcomed Christine Salter (Director of Resources and Section 151 Officer) and Allan Evans (Operational Manager - Service Accountancy).

Councillor Graham Hinchey (Cabinet Member for Corporate Resources and Performance) had sent apologies but arrived towards the end of this item.

The Director gave a presentation, after which the Chairperson invited questions from the Committee:

The Committee noted that part of the budget strategy involves making a saving of £1 million by releasing 30% of the growth overprovision for schools and asked if this had come about as a result of a reduction in funding from the Welsh Government (WG). The Committee was advised that WG required the Council to add £1.2 million and the local authority is honouring that. The expenditure needed in schools would require a further £3.391 million but the local authority view is that any extra spending should be restricted by 30% of the total that is required; that is to say 30% of £3.391 million.

The Committee asked if there is any further funding available to allow potential mergers or collaborations. The Committee was advised that the Regional Collaboration Fund was expected to last for three years but WG has decided to place a restriction on this, so the Council will actually get less. It was always a once in a lifetime fund that was meant to be spread out over three years.

The Committee noted that WG have advised the Council that it, along with other local authorities, should plan for a reduction in funding of up to 4.5% and asked what percentage of the Council's reserves might be used to make up that shortfall. The Committee was advised that the Council's reserves are £11 million and earmarked reserves are £23 million; if reserves were to be used they would be taken from the earmarked reserves.

The Committee expressed some concern about the amount of money that is being set aside to allow staff to buy more annual leave, and that the perception could be that if people were granted more leave then that could indicate that perhaps they are not really needed in their roles and the money that is spent on employing them might be better spent on providing services. The Committee was advised that before this proposal was put forward the local authority carried out some research with other core cities, including Bristol and Sheffield, and found that buying additional leave has been a popular idea with staff working in other local authorities. Other councils have found that it brings in quite a lot of money. Of course, a key principle of such a scheme would be that the needs of the service would have to be taken into account before any additional leave was approved.

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The Committee enquired about the two 'bonuses' that the local authority has received; £2.5 million from WG and £1 million for 2015/16 (£3 million over three years) from the balance sheet review. The Committee noted that these are to go towards the savings that have to be made and asked what that money might have been spent on if it were not being used in that way. The Committee was advised that there was always a balancing figure of £750,000 that it was expected would come from service reform and voluntary severance (VS) costs. Regarding the £2.5 million, it was decided that the best thing was to use that was to pay employee costs, such as VS, so that where necessary the local authority could continue to use agency staff to maintain services.

The Committee noted that as part of realignments Children's Services is to receive an extra £2.4 million and asked if that is money that has to be found in the coming year. The Committee was advised that that is the case. The local authority has been looking at the level of need of the children that are coming into its care and it is evident that there will be an overspend if Children's Services is not given further funding.

AGREED: That the Chairperson on behalf of the Committee writes to the Cabinet Member highlighting the following issues:

- **Corporate Plan:** The purpose in attaching the Corporate Plan as an appendix to the Committee's meeting papers was to enable Members to consider the alignment of the Portfolio Budget Proposals being presented at the meeting with the Administration's overall performance and policy priorities. Members found the document to have been of general assistance in supporting the scrutiny and the Directors to have helpfully identified the linkages between the Plan and the budget proposals in their presentations to Committee.

While the Committee is sure that Policy Review Committee and some other scrutiny committees may have further specific feedback on the Corporate Plan, Members' only comment was to express some surprise not to see any significant reference to a Preventative Strategy for Children's Services that the Committee has been discussing with the Director in recent months. Beyond this, the Committee has no specific feedback on the Corporate Plan.

- **Impact of non-achievement of 2014/15 savings:** Although the Committee noted that Children's Services was a positive example of a Directorate that achieved £2.6 million of its £2.7 million savings target for 2014/15, Members are aware that non-achievement of savings targeted for 2014/15 has increased pressures on this year's and future revenue budgets. With £6 million (17%) of 2015/16's savings proposal having a red residual risk rating and £2.3 million having a red achievability risk rating, Members urge the Cabinet Member and officers to maintain pressure within the organisation on the management and achievement of performance targets, and the

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Committee will be monitoring this vigorously during its quarterly performance monitoring in 2015/16.

- **Reduction to Collaboration Funding resources:** Given the significant moves towards regionalisation and rationalisation of services reporting through this Committee over the past year and its likely future trajectory, Members were worried that the reduction of allocation for collaborative initiatives from £4.8 million to £2.5 million will limit our capacity to remain agile to future opportunities to save money through collaboration.
- **Partnership for Change – service pressure risks:** Members were concerned that if not properly managed and monitored, enabling employees to purchase additional annual leave and placing additional restrictions on agency and overtime could increase pressure on delivery of front line services that report through this Committee. The Section 151 Officer stated that these savings would need to be sensitively applied to ensure continuity and efficiency of the services provided, and this will be an issue that our Committee will consider monitoring during its 2015/16 work programme.
- **Potential alternative uses of the £2.5 million capitalisation under the Partnership for Change, and the Balance Sheet Review:** Members discussed at length whether the Cabinet's proposed use of the £2.5 million windfall from Welsh Government's agreement to the Council's capitalisation proposal under the Partnership for Change would deliver best value for the Council's future needs. The capitalisation will be predicated on the disposal of assets that, once lost, will limit our future capacity to deliver services. Members questioned whether it might be more prudent to use these resources in preventative work, notably – in the case of this Committee's terms of reference – in optimising transitional arrangements for future delivery of youth and play services, and in the eagerly anticipated Children's Services Preventative Strategy.
- **Savings from Senior Management Posts:** Members felt the £200,000 target proposed to be overly modest, and urge the Cabinet Member to consider increasing this allocation.
- **Availability of Papers:** It was regrettable that the Budget Consultation report and some equality impact assessments had been delayed in reaching Committee Members.

b) Draft Budget Consultation Proposals – Education

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The Chairperson welcomed Councillor Julia Magill (Cabinet Member for Education and Skills), Nick Batchelar (Director of Education and Lifelong Learning), Neil Hardee (Head of Performance, Resources and Services) and Ian Allwood (Operational Manager, Accountancy - Schools & Budgetary Control).

Christine Salter, Director (Resources) and Section 151 Officer, and Allan Evans, Operational Manager (Service Accountancy) remained for this discussion.

The Chairperson invited Councillor Magill to make a statement. Councillor Magill informed the Committee that the Draft Corporate Plan reinforces the Council's priorities and the priorities given to education are backed up in the budget proposals. Protection to schools is essential in meeting Council priorities. Although they have this protection, because of the financial pressures they face schools will not feel better off, due to rising costs. The savings proposals that have been put forward by Education have been reduced in the last few months and this leaves room for manoeuvre within the education budget, especially in relation to the Youth Service. Councillor Magill also advised the Committee that it would have been helpful if at the Committee's meeting on 13 January 2015 she and the Director had attended for the Youth Service agenda item, during which a number of young people and other stakeholders expressed their concerns about possible cuts to the service. Councillor Magill felt that had she and the Director been invited to the meeting they would have been able to allay some of the fears of those stakeholders. Councillor Magill also advised the Committee that it should, however, be borne in mind that the Youth Service provides an open access service that is currently only being accessed by about 8% of young people. The delivery model is an outdated one and is being redesigned. There are new service delivery proposals for all areas that currently have a youth service. There are also discussions underway with regard to providing the service with some transitional funding. For example, Studio 22 at the Howardian Youth Centre should be able to continue at its present location until it can move to new premises.

The Director gave a presentation and summarised by saying that there should be an overall saving of 15% on this year's spend. These savings are regrettable but they are not fatal to the Council's execution of its duty to provide education; they are not desirable but they are manageable.

The Chairperson invited questions from the Committee.

The Committee asked how far down the line the local authority is in looking at alternative delivery models for the provision to schools of cleaning, catering and estate management services. On cleaning services, the Committee was advised that the local authority has two Direct Service Units (DSUs) and the net budget is £200,000. A number of schools have opted out of the local authority provision to source their own. The two DSUs are to be combined and there will be a net nil budget position. On catering, the Committee was

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advised that every school apart from one buys into the schools catering service. The proposal for 2015/16 is to increase prices by 20 pence per child per meal in April 2015, with a further increase of 10 pence per child per meal in April 2017. In 2015/16, this would generate income of £300,000 and bring Cardiff into the upper quartile when compared with prices being charged by other local authorities. Education has also started to look at the operating models used by other local authorities for the delivery of school meal provision. Over the years the profit that has been generated by school meals provision has been less and less. The £300,000 that will be generated by the increase in the charge for meals will cut the catering budget by a third.

Pointing out that the budget for services for children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) is very large, especially when children with SEN are in out-of-county placements, the Committee asked whether there is anything that can be done to address this issue in the long-term. The Committee was advised that some savings might be made by better oversight of charging. In the medium and long-term there are changes that can be made; there can be a review of provision and Education can work with Children's Services and with Education and Children's Services from the Vale of Glamorgan local authority to look at how services are commissioned. Both authorities have a common interest in how these services are commissioned and how the best value for money can be obtained.

Turning to the issue of the Youth Service, the Committee asked whether the proposed changes to the delivery model for these services are about improving the service or are more about making savings, and suggested that the fact that the proposals are being discussed at a time when Education is finalising its budget might lead people to think that the proposals for changes to the Youth Service are really about making savings, rather than improving the service. The Committee was advised that the proposals are about both things, and that it would be too simplistic to try and separate the two. The proposals for a change to the youth service model have been informed by both of these considerations, and the need for changes to the service is something that has been signalled to the Committee over the last two years. The Youth Service needs to be redesigned, so that as well as costing less it is more aligned with the aspirations of young people. And young people want to become involved in the commissioning of services themselves. At the moment the participation rate is only 8%.

The Committee asked if there are any plans to use schools for other purposes. The Committee was advised that in looking at the role of schools the aim is to build in some degree of community-focussed provision. Some schools have indicated that they are prepared to take over the premises currently being operated by the Youth Service and will allow young people to operate those youth centres. In this way, some parts of the Youth Service will be able to continue to operate in familiar buildings.

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The Committee was concerned that youth centres could close without having had the time to take advantage of the opportunities that exist for them to become involved in commissioning their own services.

The Committee pointed out that no matter how much responsibility and funding is delegated to schools, they will still continue to rely on the local authority for certain things that the effects of staff rationalisation might make it more difficult for the local authority to provide. The Committee was advised that the question to be faced is what is the local authority fundamentally required to do, and that there are several key functions that the local authority has to discharge; it has to ensure that there are a sufficient supply of school places; it has to ensure that there are high standards in schools; it has to ensure that the needs of vulnerable learners are met; and has responsibilities as the maintaining authority, for example, appointing school governors. The local authority has a role in convening, in bringing together schools, universities, business and the third sector, it has a role in the commissioning of services, and it has a role in championing and advocacy, particularly in relation to communities and individuals that are not well served at present. That is the thinking that lies behind the budget.

The Committee asked for confirmation that Youth Service buildings are not at risk of being sold off and was advised that the situation on buildings is not settled yet. Some buildings are to be taken over by schools but there are also other options open to the Youth Service.

The Committee asked whether there will be protection for schools that are in deficit and was advised that there is a local financial management team which can provide support to schools. The local authority monitors schools so that it can be forewarned if there are schools that might be about to go into deficit due to, for example, falling numbers of pupils. The local authority also helps schools to deal with the costs of redundancy.

The Committee suggested that it would be beneficial to look at the efficacy of early years provision and that the local authority could perhaps look to private providers more than it does. The Committee also expressed some concern that it is proposed to make savings in Education Admissions when there a lot of school admission appeal hearings and it would seem that there is an insufficient number of staff to deal with admissions. On early years provision, the Committee was advised that the grant the local authority receives for Flying Start is ring-fenced. It can't be spent on anything other than Flying Start and the local authority can not make savings on the revenue budget by pulling money out of Flying Start. A significant amount of Flying Start provision is supported by private providers and savings in the overall budget for early years have been made through a better alignment between that provision and Flying Start. On Admissions, the Committee was advised that the proposed savings are to be made through a review of the process for admissions and through things like software licenses. There has been some discussion with other local authorities about how savings might be made elsewhere.

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The Chairperson thanked the Cabinet Member and officers for attending the meeting, for their presentation and for answering questions from Members.

AGREED: That the Chairperson on behalf of the Committee writes to the Cabinet Member highlighting the following issues:

**Corporate Plan**

Members generally found the content of the Corporate Plan to have provided a useful synergy with the Education and Lifelong Learning budget proposals, and to have supported our scrutiny. Members anticipate that Members of Policy Review and Performance Scrutiny Committee might have more extensive commentary on the Corporate Plan – the only comment made at our meeting was that Members would have liked to have seen greater reference to the community focus and role of Cardiff's schools in the document.

**Budget Proposals**

**Overview:** In general terms, Members felt the answers to their questions to have been clearly answered. For instance, Members were reassured at the effective and clear steps taken to move towards a zero budget arrangement on catering and cleaning, the steps being taken to support schools in deficit, and the rigour being applied by the Director to avoid any unnecessary Consortium costs. They were pleased to hear that savings to the Admissions service would be built around processes rather than job cuts, and that consideration was being given to a mixed market of provision in the area of Early Years provision.

**Youth Services:** As the Cabinet Member would expect and indicated in her statement, this was clearly the budget proposal that was going to be of most concern to Members. After a Member suggested that bringing the proposal forward at Budget time might create confusion about the aims of this proposal (ie was it designed as a service redesign to drive up service standards, or a mechanism to save money?), Committee felt that the Cabinet Member's presentation articulated a clear and logical position on the difficult issue of Youth Services.

Recognising the external and inescapable constraints being placed upon the Council, Members agree that a minimum position of one facility in each neighbourhood tallies with similar policies in other Council portfolios. Members consider, however, that distance makes a significantly more important difference to the accessibility of youth provision than, for instance, access to a Community Hub. For young people local means local. Issues of territorialism and transport resources might make it difficult for young people to travel to youth centres more than a mile from their home.



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Similarly, although the Committee appreciates the Cabinet Member's intention to increase the current 8% service user base, Members would suggest that the Youth Service has been particularly successful over the years in supporting young people from the more disadvantaged communities, and young people disengaged from education and mainstream provision. Members hope that the Cabinet Member will be particularly minded to ensure that the more vulnerable young people are protected through the changes to current provision.

In the Chairperson's letter to Councillor Lent on Children's Play budget proposals presented this week he sought to reassure her that Committee's frustration at the apparently slow pace of progress in effecting sustainable change of provision from the Council to the community was not intended to be negative, but a positive spur to greater effort and progress. Many of the comments made in that letter might be seen to apply to Youth Services.

Members are sure that Councillor Magill is making every effort to secure sustainable future provision, but Members have not had evidence of this presented to the Committee in the past few months, and do not see any documentation in the public arena, for instance via a Cabinet Report, to set out the Administration's priorities, criteria and principles for achieving the Cabinet Member's aims. Members heard that detailed planning and negotiation was underway in many areas, and were pleased to hear the Cabinet Member's confidence that some of the venues are making excellent progress, and that transitional funding is likely to make a real difference over the coming 12 months.

The Committee was also encouraged to hear that the Cabinet Member will be seeking to explore within Cabinet use of the £2.5 million that the Council has recently secured permission from the Welsh Government to capitalise. Members hope that some of this money could be used to secure transitional funding for Youth Services.

The Cabinet Member mentioned in particular the Howardian Studio 22, and clearly Members will be pleased to see the successful continuation of this facility. But Members are equally keen that the positive contributions the Youth Service makes to early intervention and to the preventative agenda be preserved.

**SEN Inter-Authority Recoupment:** A Member, recognising the significant costs associated with SEN provision, was pleased to hear that collaborative work was underway with two other local authorities to reduce the costs associated with out of County placement for specialist SEN provision and that this might yield savings in 2016/17. The Committee will be following the progress of this saving with interest at the next Budget Scrutiny round in February 2016.

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**Community Engagement:** Members heard the Cabinet Member's concern at not being invited to participate in the Committee's January evidence session with young people, but Members are content with the approach that was taken. Members felt that the Cabinet Member and the Director often have the opportunity to present evidence to Committee, and on this occasion Members wanted to hear directly from young people, without feeling the need to be defensive or moderate any points made. As the Committee did not have the opportunity to use any of the equality impact assessment data or Budget Consultation Report at its February scrutiny due to these documents being presented so late in the day, Members are glad that the young people were afforded the opportunity to present this primary evidence to Committee.

c) Draft Budget Consultation Proposals - Children's Services

The Chairperson welcomed Councillor Sue Lent (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member, Early Years, Children and Families), Tony Young (Director of Children's Services) and Angela Bourge (Operational Manager, Strategy, Commissioning & Resources).

Christine Salter (Director of Resources and Section 151 Officer), and Allan Evans, (Operational Manager - Service Accountancy) remained for this discussion.

The Chairperson invited Councillor Lent to make a statement. Councillor Lent advised the Committee that the local authority's stated aim is to support vulnerable people. Demand for services for vulnerable children has gone up. Partnership working is very important and the safeguarding of children has to be a top priority. The findings of the Committee's task and finish report into human trafficking show that this is an area around which there is growing concern, as more and more cases come to light. In Children's Services there has been a period of accelerated recruitment and challenge. There have been few negative responses to the budget proposals and this shows that much hard work has gone into coming up with proposals that will not lead to harmful changes.

The Director gave a presentation after which the Chairperson invited questions from the Committee.

The Committee enquired about the removal of the market supplement for social workers, a payment introduced to enable recruitment to vacancies that were hard to fill. The Committee noted that removal of the supplement will create a saving of £86,000 but asked whether Council policies would enable its rapid reinstatement if too many of those social workers who currently receive it decide to leave their employment with the local authority. The Committee was advised that the supplement was only intended as a temporary measure. It was not particularly effective, has never been reviewed

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and is inequitable. It is not possible to bring the pay of other social workers up to the level of those who receive the supplement. The Director advised the Committee that he would not recommend its reinstatement.

The Committee asked how much confidence there is that the Payment by Results scheme (PBR) would achieve the large savings that have been predicted. The Committee was advised that advice received from consultants who undertook the feasibility study into the scheme is that the savings target is reasonable. Officers have been reasonably cautious in setting the target. The scheme should deliver the savings over a period of time but the challenge is to achieve them over the coming year.

The Committee noted that the draft Corporate Plan does not mention investment of a preventative strategy for Children's Services and was advised that the strategy is still being drafted and that a business case to support it needs to be developed.

Aware that there has been some realignment and centralisation of training, the Committee asked whether there was still more scope for the centralisation of training and suggested that if good quality, accredited training could be developed then that might be something that the local authority could sell to other organisations. The Committee was advised that there has been some discussion with the Director of HR People Services about a greater combination of efforts on training, and there has also been investment in e-learning.

The Committee asked how well the salary received by social workers employed by the Council compares with salaries received by social workers employed by local authorities of a similar size in Wales and England. The Committee was advised that analysis on this has already been carried out and the conclusion was that the Council offers salaries that are competitive.

The Committee asked what is being done to ensure that the local authority retains the social workers that it currently employs. The Committee was advised that social workers need to feel that their job is safe, that they are supported and listened to, and that the issue of high caseloads is being addressed. Caseloads have been reduced and the Council is now receiving many applications for social work posts, including applications from agency social workers that have been working for the Council and now want to secure permanent posts.

The Committee asked whether last year's budget plans matched the way in which money had been spent, enquiring how robust last year's budget planning had been and whether the budget pressures faced by the service have more to do with the level of demand for services rather than faulty budget planning. The Committee was advised that for 2014/15 savings of £2.5 million (out of target savings of £2.6 million) will be achieved and that the budget pressures are caused by the level of demand.

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The Committee noted that savings are to be made in the Youth Offending Service (YOS) and pointed out that at a previous meeting Members had been informed that YOS is under greater pressure than it was and has not performed as well as in previous years. The Committee asked whether it is thought that YOS needs more resources. The Committee was advised that the police have confirmed that funding for a third officer to work with YOS will be renewed. On the performance of YOS, the Committee was advised that it should be borne in mind that performance can be measured in different ways. Although there has only been a small increase in demand for the services of YOS, the complexity of the cases the team is dealing with is greater than it has been. The Operational Manager for YOS is confident that she can continue with the resources that she has at present.

The Committee noted that it is expected that PBR will save achieve savings of £674,000 and asked how much certainty there is on this. The Committee was advised that the original figures that had been used for PBR modelling were reviewed, using a financial model that is different from the one suggested by the consultants and it was found that the savings could be even greater than those that are projected.

#### Children's Play

The Chairperson welcomed Chris Hespe (Director for Sport, Leisure and Culture) who gave a presentation following which the Chairperson invited questions from the Committee.

The Committee asked why the decision was made to protect Welsh medium play services in the budget proposals, and the equity of provision for speakers of other languages. The Committee was advised that the Council has made a commitment in the past that play services should be provided for children who speak Welsh, and that the new commissioning framework had been designed to enable a certain level of Welsh-medium play provision. The Chairperson reminded the Committee that the Welsh language has an official and equal status in Wales.

The Committee asked how the Council can remove the red tape that creates obstacles to communities that want to take on, under the Community Asset Transfer (CAT) scheme, the responsibility for the management of a community service or asset, such as a building, that was formerly run by the Council. Communities might be ready to do this but if the process takes too long then the transitional funding may no longer be available. The Committee was advised that communities need to be given simpler messages on this, and more support should be provided. The Stepping Up Toolkit, which is a guide to the process, may have deterred some people and may have come too late.

The Committee enquired about the Cabinet's appetite for risk on this issue, asking if there is not a case for the Council to be more flexible when it comes to compliance with regulations and process and to be more prepared to face

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the criticism for that, should it come. The most important thing is to get the assets into the community. The Committee also asked whether it has been acknowledged that even if Friend's groups want to take over play centres, they will need more time to do so. The Committee also pointed out that the costs of TUPE, the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) regulations under which the terms and conditions of workers transferring to the employment of community-run organisations would be protected, are a big deterrent to communities that might consider taking on the running of community assets. The Committee was advised that there is to be a joint commissioning process with the Youth Service, although drawing up a new approach is difficult at present because it is not yet known what the decision about budget proposals will be. The play provider market in Cardiff is not very advanced because previously the Council has always been the provider.

The Committee also pointed out that potential managers needed to have the details of leases on building much earlier, so that they could decide whether taking on the asset would be viable. Some Members stated that the decision date on the budget is now only three weeks away and yet it is only now that communities are being given these details, making it very late for them to make their decisions. Some Members believed that leases were just one example of delay. The Committee was advised that it is regrettable that the process did not start earlier but the Council has not yet given up on CATs. The Director did not accept that there has been a lack of clarity on things like leases. Meetings have been held over several months and no barriers are being put up nor has information been untimely, but it is the case that communities are not confident about taking on these assets. He stated that the 2014/15 budget savings proposal had been to keep the play centres open for 2014/15 whilst a new model for children's play was developed. There had been options presented to community organisations, although there had been no appetite for any option other than for the centres to remain open and managed by the Council. Interest by localities in taking over the management of the facilities had, in the majority of instances, only been considered in recent months, although no firm proposals had come forward from the community. He and colleagues had continually stressed how flexible the authority would be in matters such as leases and had offered meetings and advice to all the localities. Only a few had taken up this offer.

The Committee enquired whether community-run assets would be subject to any kind of regular inspection and was advised that Safeguarding, Health & Safety and the Play Association should provide some safeguards.

The view of the Committee was that what is needed for community asset and service transfers is for there to be firm decisions from the Cabinet on things like leases and the insurance of properties, which will enable communities to make their decisions. The Council's forward plan to achieve savings includes asking communities to take on community assets. The rules and regulations on things like asbestos and Legionnaires' Disease have had the effect of deterring people. A complete set of guidance for potential managers from the community should be available, and guidance is not something that volunteers

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should have to pull together from various sources within and outside of the Council.

The Chairperson thanked the Cabinet Member and officers for attending the meeting, for their presentations and for answering questions from Members.

AGREED: That the Chairperson on behalf of the Committee writes to the Cabinet Member highlighting the following issues:

## **CHILDREN'S SERVICES**

### **Corporate Plan**

Members considered parts of the Corporate Plan relating to the Cabinet Members areas of responsibility at the meeting, and were grateful to the Cabinet Member for teasing out the linkages between the Administration's key priorities and the budget choices the Administration has made in her area.

Members were somewhat surprised not to see greater reference to the Preventative Strategy in that document, or financial allocation in the Cabinet Member's budget proposals. The Director clarified that a funding bid might be made to the Council's Investment Review Board during the coming financial year to facilitate the development of this Strategy, and Members look forward to receiving details of this in due course.

### **Budget Proposals**

**Overview:** As an overview of our feedback on the Directorate's budget proposals, the Committee was pleased that efforts had been made to mitigate the most serious impacts on service users through the savings presented. Members were also heartened at the Section 151 Officer's indication that £2.5 million of the Cabinet Member's 2014/15 savings target of £2.6 million was due to be realised by 31 March. Members would like to congratulate the Director for coming close to his challenging target for the year.

**Service Realignment:** Members heard that £2.4 million realignment had been achieved to mitigate existing in-year demand, and (on clarification) that an additional £950,000 had been set aside as a contingency for predicted future demand pressures on services. A point made on this topic by Members at the Way Forward is that at this time in the Budget cycle they are often informed that realignment has had to take place to resolve unforeseen demographic pressures affecting Children's Services during the year, but they are rarely advised of a windfall due to an over-calculation of that demand at the start of the year. The Committee will be keen to explore this topic at a future meeting. Members recognise that calculation of future demand will always be an imprecise science, but are

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keen to ensure that they can maintain the most accurate forecasts possible to minimise unforeseen shocks as our overall financial resilience is placed at greater pressure in future years.

**Youth Offending:** Questions were raised by several Members about the Youth Offending Service saving proposal. The Committee understands the Director's assertion that due to the Team's successful work caseloads have fallen sharply, and that it is difficult to therefore justify existing expenditure levels. Members were also reassured that Police funding for a post in the Team will be maintained again next year. Members heard, however, that the residual "rump" of cases tend to be the more complex and intractable ones, and are keen that the Cabinet Member ensures that this excellent team's capacity and continued good progress is not placed under too much pressure next year.

**Payment by Results:** Members inquired at the robustness of the £674,000 savings target, and were reassured by the Director's and the Operational Manager's comments that this was an achievable figure. Members look forward to monitoring this in the next financial year.

**Miscellaneous Reassurance:**

- Members heard reassurance on the resilience of social worker training support, and Leaving Care support, which would both generate efficiencies next year by joint working with other Council Directorates.
- Similarly, the Director reassured Members that morale and retention within the workforce were robust and that the removal of the market supplement for social work posts would not affect staff retention.
- A Member queried whether provision for ICT resources had been made to enable more efficient work practices in the social care workforce next year, and heard that this would most likely be needed in 2016/17. During the 2015/16 financial year, the Director will be focussing more on service redesign and reshaping as an essential precursor to identify what the future IT needs of the workforce would be. Members could see the logic in this, and look forward to working with the Cabinet Member to provide scrutiny of the reshaping arrangements in the next financial year.

**CHILDREN'S PLAY BUDGET PROPOSALS**

Members appreciated the Director of Sport, Leisure and Culture's detailed presentation on the challenges of achieving the Council's goal of partnership with localities and communities in securing sustainable play provision for the future, given the savings target proposed.

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This is a very emotive issue for many Members, who have strong views on the very negative impacts on their communities should the existing provision wither away and buildings potentially have to close. Members clearly understand the legal and financial complexities involved in securing sustainable transition of management from the Council to informal community groups. But despite the Director's outline of some of the key actions taken by the Council in recent months (and wishing to convey appreciation for the efforts that have been invested by officers) Members expressed a strong degree of frustration that little progress appeared to have been made during the past 12 months, and a low level of confidence that enough progress would be made before the guillotine of 31 March 2016 to enable the buildings to survive.

Members have a strong view that if the savings proposal on Children's Play is predicated around sustainable transfer to community groups, it is very unlikely to be feasible in the proposed timescale.

Members had the impression that there had been a number of false dawns during the past year, thwarted by a lack of clarity on the Council's position on the respective merits of leasing and community asset transfer, the likely price the Council would wish to realise from the assets and whether a commissioning plan was in place. However the Director did state that clear costings and expectations had been provided to communities.

It is difficult for us to judge this matter as a Committee. Although the Paper to support the consultation on Play Proposals published on the Council website provided plenty of detailed information, Members would have liked to see Cabinet clearly set out its position on the cost of leases, on TUPE and on its preference for leases or community asset transfer, to give clearer direction to communities on these issues.

Members feel that, notwithstanding legal criteria on "best consideration" affecting the Council's view on the level of financial return it had to secure for lease of assets, there is clearly huge "social wellbeing" at risk if the facilities close. Members understand that the Cabinet Member only assumed Portfolio responsibility for Play in July, but feel that as Cabinet Portfolio lead she should take a strong lead and an entrepreneurial, risk-friendly approach to working with communities, and that legal, financial and procurement experts should be tasked with coming up with practical solutions to support communities and solve problems.

**60: DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting will be held on 10 March 2015 at 2.30pm in Committee Room 4, County Hall

The meeting closed at 2.30pm.



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Signed \_\_\_\_\_  
Chairperson

Date \_\_\_\_\_