

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

18 FEBRUARY 2019

Present: Councillor Bridgeman (Chairperson),
Councillors Philippa Hill-John, Joyce, Phillips, Taylor and Singh

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

Yasmin Bahary (Cardiff Youth Council)

71 : APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Linda Morgan, Dan De'Ath, Patricia Arlotte and Rebecca Crump.

72 : DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were received.

73 : MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 15 January 2019 were agreed as a correct record of the meeting and signed by the chairperson.

74 : DRAFT CORPORATE PLAN 2019-2022 AND DRAFT BUDGET PROPOSALS 2019-2020

The Chairperson outlined that the budget proposals were published for consultation at Council on 15 November 2018 and will be considered by Cabinet at its business meeting on 21 February 2019, prior to being considered by Council on 28 February 2019.

Members were advised that they would receive an outline on the general budgetary position followed by the budget proposals will be considered in two parts; the Children's services element; the Education element together with School Transport.

Corporate Overview

The Chairperson welcomed Councillor Weaver (Cabinet Member Finance, Modernisation and Performance), Christine Salter (Corporate Director, Resources) and Allan Evans (Operational Manager, Finance) to the meeting.

The Chairperson invited the Cabinet Member to make a statement.

Councillor Weaver confirmed the budget gap as being £32.4m. Whilst a council tax rise of 4.9% will raise £6.7m it cannot bridge the budget gap. The directorate savings are, in the main, those that went out to consultation in the Autumn. Whilst Cardiff received the largest final settlement from Welsh Government, in real terms it is a cut of 9%. The Council will have to find a further £105m in savings over the course of the next 4 years.

Members of the Committee received an overview of the Budget Proposals from Christine Salter during which she outlined information in relation to the following:

- Final Settlement;
- Consultation;
- Draft Revenue Budget;
- Medium Term Outlook; and
- Draft Capital Programme

The Committee were invited to comment, seek clarification or raise questions on the information received. Those discussions were summaries as follows:

- Members referred to the Digital First programme and queried whether the level of savings referred to in the previous budget had been achieved. The Committee were advised that it has not been as easy to achieve or identify the savings as had been first anticipated. The Council App and virtual assistant has been introduced which has resulted in some visible savings within the resources savings. It is anticipated that use of that service together with the Bilingual Chat Bot will further encourage members of the public to self-serve. It is hoped that enabling technology within the social care sphere will also add to the achievability of savings.

Members sought clarification as to what was the percentage of savings being attributed to Digital First and were advised that it is difficult to establish how much, a view which is taken across the UK. It is important to try and track the savings and make sure that you do have a baseline. The Corporate Director advised that £7.7m of the £19.15 savings was badged as Business Processes and that this included digital processes.

- Members noted the number of responses to the consultation, however the Cabinet Member accepted that, whilst there had been some change in the consultation process involving young people there is still room for improvement.
- Members queried whether, when consulting on the budget, it would be possible to obtain the views of the public in relation to their priorities rather than savings and expenditure. It was accepted that that would be a good idea and has been done in previous years.
- Members noted the budget gap referred to in the Medium Term Financial Plan of £104m over the next 4 years and sought clarification as to what is being done now to try and ensure that that gap is kept to a minimum. The Corporate Director advised that the amount of savings required is not something new. Officers are continuing to do their best to ensure that Directorates are ready to make the necessary savings by trying to help and guide them, for example, making the best use of digital technology, reducing reliance on assets, analysing income such as fees and charges, and considering the level of subsidies.

Social Services (Children's Services)

The Chairperson welcomed Councillor Graham Hinchey (Cabinet Member, Children and Families), Claire Marchant (Director of Social Services) and Nick Blake to the meeting. Christine Salter (Corporate Director, Resources) and Allan Evans (Operational Manager, Finance) remained for this item.

The Chairperson invited Councillor Hinchey to make a statement in which he outlined the need to align the Corporate Plan with the Capital Ambition programme.

Members of the Committee were provided with a presentation by the Director which outlined the Corporate Plan Steps and Performance Measures as they related to Children's Services, together with the savings proposals and information in relation to a number of financial pressure bids.

The Committee were invited to comment, seek clarification or raise questions on the information received. Those discussions were summaries as follows:

- Members queried the number of performance measures where the target is referred to as no target, and asked whether these targets are benchmarked against other authorities. Members were advised that benchmarking is conducted by all authorities. There are a number of external factors which would affect the target, for example the judiciary when deciding which orders to make. In relation to residential orders, the figure fluctuates and very small numbers have a huge impact in terms of budget. It is important to ensure that the right children and in the right placement and they are only there for as long as is necessary.

Members queried the ongoing difficulties in relation to agency versus council pay. Members were advised that there has been an escalation in the cost of agency workers, and stressed the importance of trying to attract permanent staff and perhaps more importantly to look at the skill mix of those permanent staff.

- Members sought clarification in relation to the target figure of 18% in relation to Children's Services social work vacancies and whether that target was realistic, bearing in mind it currently stands at 30%. The Cabinet Member informed Members that a meeting had been arranged with Julie Morgan, Welsh Government Minister in the coming weeks. The recruitment of staff in this field is a struggle, the high case load can be a disadvantage. There is a bit of a sea change within the Cardiff area due in part to the nature of the case work. It is important to try and retain staff. There needs to be a benchmark across authorities so staff are less inclined to move across the borders. It is also important to consider the structure and mix of staff.

Members queried whether it is worth investing in targeted advertising to make it more attractive and were advised that within the remodelling of the fostering service a marketing officer post has been created. The Cabinet Member advised that Welsh Government are investing in the adoption service, the aim is to get children into permanent placements.

- Members sought clarification on whether there had been consultation in relation to the reasonable punishment bill and whether the implementation of such a bill will have a negative effect on current trends. Members were advised that there had been consultation.
- Members referred to Mental Health Services, the transformational funding and also queried whether the pressure bids align with other partners and organisations. The Director advised that there is good partnership working in Cardiff – South Wales Police, Education and Health all want to be part of the vision that we are presenting; the comments from partners have been encouraging and it will be a boost to all.
- Members sought information about the work force strategy and were advised that there is a recruitment and retention strategy is being implemented, together with a refreshed workforce plan.

Education

The Chairperson welcomed Councillor Sarah Merry (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member, Education Employment and Skills), Nick Batchelar (Direction, Education and Lifelong Learning) and Neil Hardee (Head of Performance Resources and Services) to the meeting. Christine Salter (Corporate Director, Resources) and Rob Green (Operational Manager, Finance) remained for the meeting.

The Chairperson invited Councillor Merry to make a statement in which she indicated that in a time of austerity extra funding is still be delivered to schools. Whilst it is accepted that all of the pressures on the school budget are not being met, the ambition is to continue to deliver for every child in the city in light of the Corporate Plan, the building of a Child Friendly City and the Band B programme of school investment.

Members of the Committee were provided with a presentation setting out the various objectives contained within the Corporate Plan and the Budget Proposals going forward.

The Committee were invited to comment, seek clarification or raise questions on the information received. Those discussions were summaries as follows:

- Members asked for further information about EOTAS funding following the pupil. In theory if more responsibility on the school is anticipated that numbers will drop. Officers advised that children become EOTAS for a number of reasons. Whilst on roll at the school they get funding and funding can be clawed back. There is currently a gap in funding which has resulted in a central budget overspend. However if the pressure bid of £500k is successful it could bridge the gap and provide some breathing space. Currently a deep dive into EOTAS provision is ongoing involving Cardiff and other authorities. It will look at the different types of provision and actions which will allow more efficient management of both budgets and provision. It is important that schools recognise that they have a responsibility to those children – there does need to be a reset of the relationship with schools and to challenge whether they have done enough, much as other schools have done.

- Members referred to ALN traded services and queried, as we are expecting schools change, whether money being handed to schools on the one hand will be then be taken away by the others. Officers advised that Cardiff has specific School Service Level Agreements and been able to retain a broad breadth of specialist provision which other authorities have been unable to do.

Cardiff is in a good position currently, ALNET will change the mind set of schools, other stakeholders, parents and families. Whilst figures have been provided by Welsh Government, it is anticipated that there will be a funding for training. There will be opportunities for Cardiff to provide training, it is believed that schools other than in the Cardiff area will buy back training.

- Members queried whether the additional grant funding would cover anticipated overspending or whether it will be ring fenced for future projects, including music services. Members were advised that the additional funding will help to redress the balance, however potential new projects are being considered. Members were reminded that the authority stopped providing a direct music service some years ago and are dependent on schools to buy back in.

School Transport

The Chairperson welcomed and Steve Gerrard (Network Operations Team Leader) to the meeting. Cllr Sarah Merry, (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member, Education, Employment and Skills), Christine Salter (Corporate Director, Resources) and Rob Green (Operational Manager, Finance) remained for the meeting.

Members of the Committee were provided with a presentation.

The Committee were invited to comment, seek clarification or raise questions on the information received. Those discussions were summaries as follows:

- Members sought clarification of the savings proposal of £400k for Route optimisation and were advised that there have already been savings of £240k, which leaves £160k to be addressed.
- Members discussed Transport Support Allowances (TSA) and were advised that currently parents of 24 pupils attending Ty Glas/Ty Gwynne are benefiting from the roll out of the TSA, and that no extra spending is being incurred.
- Members were advised that Air Quality on schools routes is being considered, albeit by another team.
- Members queried the validation system for the provision of payment for transport. The Officer advised that the provision of transport is reviewed on a case by case basis. Different rates operate in respect of different school, negotiation takes place with parents in relation to the journey and the needs of the pupil. Claims are thereafter submitted monthly and paid termly.

- Members discussed the optimisation of routes and were advised that those routes will factor in future house building. Members noted that both parents and schools were consulted. The goal was to try and achieve as short a journey as possible.

AGREED: That the Chairperson writes to the Cabinet Member on behalf of the Committee expressing their comments and observations discussed during the Way Forward.

75 : 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.

76 : URGENT ITEMS (IF ANY)

There were no urgent items.

77 : DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The date of the next scheduled meeting of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee is on Tuesday 12 March 2019 at 4.30 pm in Committee Room 4.