

Ref: Scrutiny/AEJ/LB/CW/010323

1 March 2023

Councillor Chris Weaver,
Cabinet Member for Finance, Modernisation & Performance,
Room 519,
County Hall,
Atlantic Wharf,
Cardiff CF10 4UW.



Dear Councillor Weaver,

Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee – 28 February 2023

On behalf of the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee I would like to thank you, Councillor Lister, Councillor Merry, Cllr Bradbury and officers for attending the Committee meeting on Tuesday 28 February 2023 to consider the Draft Budget Proposals 2023-24 and Draft Corporate Plan 2023 - 26.

The meeting initially considered the Corporate Overview and was followed by scrutiny of the draft budget proposals and sections of the draft corporate plan relevant to the terms of reference of the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee. The comments and observations made by Members following this item are set out in this letter.

❖ **Corporate Overview**

In terms of your Portfolio, Members felt there were a number of issues that would require your input and commitment going forward and would appreciate your views on.

Firstly, the Committee wish to commend you and Cabinet colleagues for the commitments given to budgets in Education and Children's Services. The uplifts were very welcomed and we will support you in ensuring Directorates are achieving their commitments and priorities and budgets are used effectively across all Directorates that fall within this Committee's Terms of Reference.

During our questioning, we asked you about the following issues and noted responses:

- What was being done to address budget overspends and bringing budgets back into line?
- We asked you about Corporate Risk and despite increase in budgets, assurances on whether the risk was manageable, given the ambitious commitments in the Corporate Plan and against the backdrop of overspends and demands on services?
- Grant funding and reliance on grants and sought assurance that services would not be affected by uncertainty of grant funding and resultant impact in planning and sustainability of services.
- 3.95% increase in Council Tax and how this compares with other local authorities in Wales, and what modelling on future projections had been undertaken.
- FRM - sought clarification in its purpose and what it is used for.

In addition, we asked questions on the following areas. We request a response to these.

- Budget Consultation - we asked what the circa 6000 responses were as a percentage of the whole population of Cardiff. **Please provide this information.** In addition, we asked whether the timing of the consultation was most effective (over Christmas etc) and noted the response, linked to the next issue.
- We asked what impact of the timings or delays of UK and Welsh Government's announcements on budget settlements has had in terms of the in the budget setting process. We **request** that you provide a further narrative on this, and how the slow delivery of announcements that has happened this year has had an impact on council decisions and some further information on how you have had to overcome this.

❖ Children's Services

The Committee welcomed the 9.7% net increase in the Children's Services budget for 2023/24 and would like to thank the Cabinet for continuing to support this area.

Budget Proposals

During the Q&A session, we asked a number of questions on the budget, particularly around what the service wishes to deliver with additional funding; how the service will evaluate the changes it introduces, given the ambitions the service has under its "people, place and practice" priorities; whether the service is confident it can achieve its efficiency savings, given the demands on the service; and delivering the FRM commitment on increased activities for Children Looked After and those at the edge of care. We noted the responses given.

We asked questions in relation to how the budget will be used to increase the number of adopters; and **request** that you provide numbers of children and young people in this cohort awaiting adoption and for further information on those placed in county and out of county.

Corporate Plan 2023-26

In relation to the Corporate Plan, Members asked a number of questions in relation to commitments and KPIs. This included 3 x new KPIs on the Youth Justice Service (which had been set nationally by the Youth Justice Board); and KPIs K1.16 and K1.17 relating to care leavers in education and employment. We asked whether the targets were challenging enough, and the Director of Children's Services stated that she would provide more information on these KPIs. We would suggest that she take into account the following when providing a response.

Overall, the Committee sought clarity on the KPIs relating to Children's Services across the board. We questioned some of the wording of the PIs, particularly those set nationally, and would wish to know whether the Council has a say in the development of the PIs?

We would **request** that further information be provided on the Children's Services KPIs as to whether they have been developed locally or nationally; and (where appropriate) how the targets have been set and the rationale for developing and implementing them. We also felt that any previous performance should be included in the Corporate Plan to give an insight into the progress being made and allow us to measure the impact of the KPIs. We also need to be able to measure whether KPIs are realistic, achievable but also challenging.

Unregistered Care settings

A Member of the Committee asked questions on this issue, and we would appreciate any information that could be provided on unregistered care settings in Cardiff. We would wish for the Cabinet Member and officers come to a future Scrutiny Committee to discuss developments and innovations in Children's Services, and request that this be part of these discussions.

Recruitment and Retention of Staff

We asked questions in relation to plans for attracting new social work staff – what packages are available etc. and noted responses. We will monitor this issue via quarterly performance data submitted to the committee.

Ty Storrie

Members asked questions on proposals for Ty Storrie but seek further clarification on this proposal. We noted that there is a CHAD place at Ty Storrie and understand plans for other provisions coming into the provision.

We **request** that further information be provided on the following:

- What is the status of the CHAD bed currently at Ty Storrie?
- Is the CHAD place remaining at Ty Storrie or being moved into the community? If so, are we sure this is an efficiency saving if removing a niche/bespoke bed? If we subsequently need it, do we run a risk trying to find a private provider or out of county placement and therefore potentially negate the saving proposed.
- Further information on proposed services coming into Ty Storrie

Education & Lifelong Learning

Members of the Committee would like to again commend the Cabinet for retaining and protecting education and school budgets.

Budget Proposals

During the Q&A, we sought assurances that the service can mitigate risks, including any deficit budgets in schools. We asked questions around ensuring that schools are operating to their maximum efficiency and minimising waste. We heard that over the next couple of months, the picture will become clearer on the budgets of individual schools. Our work programme already contains a follow up session on post-pandemic recovery with Members, officers and head teachers to be undertaken at our meeting in July. We will follow up this issue with them then, but if you have any thoughts on this issue, it would be welcomed. In addition, we were informed that 5 schools were projecting overspends in the current year, and we would **request** that a list of who these are would be appreciated.

Fees and Charges

Members asked about the 5% increase in school meals, particularly what EIA informed us, and more details on what consultation had been done? We also asked about the potential impact on families; and how is the LEA supporting

schools on this; and sought clarification on price increase and how this interacts with WG Policy on universal free school meals. We noted responses on this.

We asked about the impact of increased fees and charges in use of Storey Arms and what support is available for schools and parents? We noted the response.

Corporate Plan

Due to time pressures, there were a number of questions relating to Corporate Plan that we were unable to ask. Therefore, we would seek a response on the following queries:

- Commitments S1.06 – S1.08 – there are a number of commitments in relation to refreshing, relaunching and redeveloping a series of documents and programmes. Please could you explain the rationale behind this? Are we not able to concentrate on delivering the plans and policies already in place so that schools have time to embed plans before we change them again?
- Linked with previous queries in Children’s Services KPIs – please can you provide more information in relation to K1.03 - *The percentage of children and young people between the age of 8 and 18 who state they are able to do their best to learn and progress at school all or most of the time*? The wording appears very woolly. What does this KPI mean? Who set it? What is the methodology for collecting this data?
- (K1.12) - *The number of added formal Additional Learning Needs places delivered across the City (Target to be achieved by September 2023).* The target is set at 151 by September 2023 – does this target need to be more challenging and cover the whole year? Why September 2023?

- Regarding the use of the pupil development grant for free school meals - how this will be impacted in relation to roll-out of free school meals across the primary sector? How are you going to identify these, what formula will be used?

Attendance Strategy

We welcomed the news that an Attendance Strategy was under development but would **request** that more information be supplied on any research being carried out on this issue, to build core data to underpin the Strategy. At our meeting in December, we heard a myriad of reasons lie behind attendance problems but would welcome any details arising from research. We will also ensure that this issue is addressed at the Pandemic Recovery update at our meeting in July.

During discussions on this issue, we queried whether the attendance target for primary schools in particular was challenging enough – notwithstanding the complexities surrounding non-attendance at the moment, and we would **welcome your feedback** on this.

Future Capital Project Join-up Opportunities

At the meeting, Members considered a range of Capital Programme Projects, including a range of community facilities (including a Youth Hub) and proposals in relation to the Community Focussed Schools Programme.

Members felt that joining up of these types of projects could present an excellent opportunity across the City to join-up developments of new community facilities and schools. The Fairwater Campus proposal has already been cited an example of doing this, and the Committee would **recommend** that the Cabinet explore and commit to this option going forward.

Supporting Young People

Youth Service

Members have, at previous meetings of this Committee championed the work of the youth service and would wish to state that it fully supports the work that Cllr Bradbury and officers are aiming to achieve in this area.

We asked a number of questions about the funding of this service – about the reliance on grants in recent years; the earmarked reserves (line 68 in Appendix 7 of Cabinet papers); efficiency savings proposals (Appendix 6a in Scrutiny papers only – ref EDUE9) to align budgets across youth services, Cardiff Commitment and Child Friendly cities teams; and numerous proposals within the FRM Appendix (Appendix 3 in Cabinet report papers).

Due to this, Members were unclear on what this means in terms of the Youth Service budget and would therefore **request** that some further detail on the makeup of this budget be provided, so that we have a clear picture of what funds are available; whether the service is gaining or losing funds; what parts of the service (and where) funds are being spent. Therefore, we request this be provided.

We noted the work being done across the service in retaining funding; tapping into grants available; mapping services; talking to young people at current youth centres; developing the Passport to the City etc. We also welcome the commitments by Welsh Government Interim Youth Work Board (and Task & Finish Groups) and the work of Keith Towler.

We feel confident that those responsible for managing and developing the Service will do so effectively; make the best use of the funds that are available; review and align services within the Youth Service itself and more widely across council; and make best use of partnership and collaboration in delivering an enhanced service.

We firmly believe that Youth Services should be prioritised as an invest to save service, which has a strong core budget to enable it to plan, build and develop appropriately. We were surprised to compare the budget of a secondary school at around £10m to a key service such as Youth Services that covers the whole of Cardiff and provides invaluable support to schools and the wider community having £1.5m, much of which is grant funding.

We therefore **recommend** that the Cabinet agree to undertake a review of the Youth Service budget, and report back on how it intends to strengthen the budget going forward. This would include how it will move away from the reliance on grant funding; and how it will grow the base budget and sustain it in the coming years.

Youth Provision/Facilities

During the meeting, Members sought assurances that youth facilities (including sport and music) are expanded and available/affordable for all young people, particularly vulnerable young people.

We noted the work that is already being done in this area and welcome some of the mapping work being undertaken in areas of Cardiff to establish what is already available; learning from good practice such as Cllr Bradbury speaking to young people in youth centres; realignment of services; developments such as Passport to the City; Cardiff's Little Gigs; focussing on getting females into sport and activities; building grants systems with providers etc. We also noted the external consultant's report in this area. Our work programme already has a commitment for "youth provision" to come to this Scrutiny Committee in June 2023, so we will discuss these issues further in due course.

Youth Hubs

Members wished to explore the development of the City centre (and other) Youth Hubs in the City. We recognise that this sits within Cllr Thorne's

Portfolio. We would therefore **request** that Councillor Thorne provide the Committee with details on proposals for Youth Hubs. We were particularly interested in whether the commitment (S4.06) to progress a Youth Hub in the City centre by Summer 2023 was on course and any details about it.

To recap, the Committee is requesting the following information:

Corporate

1. Budget Consultation – **Provide details of** what the circa 6000 responses were as a percentage of the whole population of Cardiff.
2. Provide a view on what impact of the timings or delays of UK and Welsh Government's announcements on budget settlements has had in terms of the in the budget setting process; and how the slow delivery of announcements that has happened this year has had an impact on council decisions and some further information on how you have had to overcome this.

Children's Services

3. Children Looked After - provide numbers of children and young people in this cohort awaiting adoption and further information on those placed in county and out of county.
4. KPIs - further information be provided on the Children's Services KPIs as to whether they have been developed locally or nationally; and (where appropriate) how the targets have been set and the rationale for developing and implementing them. Also provide some observations in relation to any previous performance being included in the Corporate Plan to give an insight into the progress being made and allow us to measure the impact of the KPIs. We also need to be able to measure whether KPIs are realistic, achievable but also challenging.

5. Ty Storrie – provide further information in relation to the following:
- What is the status of the CHAD bed currently at Ty Storrie?
 - Is the CHAD place remaining at Ty Storrie or being moved into the community? If so, are we sure this is an efficiency saving if removing a niche/bespoke bed? If we subsequently need it, do we run a risk trying to find a private provider or out of county placement and therefore potentially negate the saving proposed.
 - Further information on proposed services coming into Ty Storrie

Education & Lifelong Learning

6. Corporate Plan – responses on the following additional queries:
- a) Commitments S1.06 – S1.08 – there are a number of commitments in relation to refreshing, relaunching and redeveloping a series of documents and programmes. Please could you explain the rationale behind this? Are we not able to concentrate on delivering the plans and policies already in place so that schools have time to embed plans before we change them again?
- b) Linked with previous queries in Children’s Services KPIs – please can you provide more information in relation to K1.03 - *The percentage of children and young people between the age of 8 and 18 who state they are able to do their best to learn and progress at school all or most of the time*? The wording appears very woolly. What does this KPI mean? Who set it? What is the methodology for collecting this data?
- c) (K1.12) - *The number of added formal Additional Learning Needs places delivered across the City (Target to be achieved by September 2023)*. The target is set at 151 by September 2023 – does this target need to be more challenging and cover the whole year? Why September 2023?

d) Regarding the use of the pupil development grant for free school meals
- how this will be impacted in relation to roll-out of free school meals
across the primary sector? How are you going to identify these, what
formula will be used?

7. Attendance Strategy – provide more information on any research being carried out on this issue, to build core data to underpin the Strategy. We would also welcome views on our query whether the target for attendance in primary schools in particular was challenging enough – notwithstanding the complexities surrounding non-attendance at the moment.
8. Overspends information - we were informed that 5 schools were projecting overspends in the current year, and we would **request** that a list of who these are would be appreciated.

Supporting Young People

9. Youth Service budget - further detail on the makeup of this budget be provided, so that we have a clear picture of what funds are available; whether the service is gaining or losing funds; what parts of the service (and where) funds are being spent.
10. Youth Hubs - request that Cllr Thorne provide the Committee with details on proposals for Youth Hubs. We were particularly interested in whether the commitment (S4.06) to progress a Youth Hub in the City centre by Summer 2023 was on course and any details about it.

Recommendations to be monitored following this Scrutiny.

To summarise, the Scrutiny Committee made two formal recommendations which is set out below. As part of the response to this letter we would be grateful if you could, for the recommendation, state whether the recommendation is accepted, partially accepted or not accepted and summarise the Cabinet’s response. If the recommendation is accepted or partially accepted, I would also be grateful if you could identify the responsible officer and provide an action date. This will ensure that progress can be monitored as part of the approach agreed by Cabinet in December 2020.

Recommendation	Accepted, Partially Accepted or Not Accepted	Cabinet Response	Responsible Officer	Implementation Date
<p><u>Future Capital Project Join-up Opportunities</u></p> <p>1. Members felt that joining up of some of the new capital projects around community facilities and schools could present an excellent opportunity across the City to join-up developments of new community facilities and schools. The Fairwater Campus proposal has already been cited an example of doing this, and the Committee would recommend that the Cabinet explore and commit to this option going forward.</p>				

<p><u>Youth Services:</u></p> <p>2. We recommend that the Cabinet agree to undertake a review of the Youth Service budget, and report back on how it intends to strengthen the budget going forward. This would include how it will move away from the reliance on grant funding; and how it will grow the base budget and sustain it in the coming years.</p>				
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I would be grateful if you would consider the above comments and work with the relevant Cabinet portfolio holders to provide a response to the content of this letter.

Yours sincerely,



COUNCILLOR LEE BRIDGEMAN
Chairperson – Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee

Cc: Councillor Ash Lister, Cabinet Member for Social Services (Children’s Services)
Councillor Sarah Merry, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Education
Councillor Peter Bradbury, Cabinet Member for Tackling Poverty & Supporting Young People
Councillor Lynda Thorne, Cabinet Member for Housing & Communities
Chris Lee, Corporate Director Resources
Ian Allwood, Head of Finance
Melanie Godfrey, Director of Education & Lifelong Learning
Richard Portas, Programme Director of School Organisation Planning.

Steve Morris, Operational Manager, Sport, Leisure and Development,
Economic Development
Neil Hardee, Head of Services to Schools
Suzanne Scarlett, Suzanne Scarlett, Operational Manager –
Partnerships & Performance, Education & Lifelong Learning
Sarah McGill, Corporate Director People & Communities
Deborah Driffield, Director of Children's Services
Gary Jones, Head of Democratic Services
Dylan Owen, Head of Cabinet Office
Members of Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee
Jo Watkins, Cabinet Support Office
Tim Gordon & Jeremy Rhys, Media and Comms
Cllr Adrian Robson – Group Leader
Cllr Rodney Berman – Group Leader
Cllr Andrea Gibson – Group Leader
David Hugh Thomas – Chair Governance & Audit Committee