

COMMUNITY & ADULT SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

27 FEBRUARY 2023

Present: Councillor Molik(Chairperson)
Councillors Ahmed, Ash-Edwards, Boes, Lent, Lewis, Littlechild
and McGarry

41 : APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

None received.

42 : DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Molik declared a personal interest as CEO of Sight Cymru.

43 : MINUTES

The minutes of the meetings held on 12/12/22 and 16/01/23 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairperson.

44 : DRAFT CORPORATE PLAN 2023-2026 & DRAFT BUDGETARY PROPOSALS 2023/24

The Chairperson advised Members that this item was to consider the elements of the draft Corporate Plan and Budget Proposals that fall within the remit of the Committee.

The proposals are due to be considered by Cabinet on Thursday the 2nd of March, before being considered by Council on the 9th of March.

Members were advised that the meeting would begin with Members receiving a Corporate Overview of the budget.

The budget proposals, and parts of the Corporate Plan relevant to the committee, will then be considered in line with Cabinet Member's portfolios, considering Cllr Sangani's area of responsibility first, then Cllr Mackie, then Cllr Bradbury and then ending with Cllr Thorne.

Corporate Overview

The Chairperson welcomed Councillor Chris Weaver, Cabinet Member for Finance, Modernisation and Performance and Officers Chris Lee, and Ian Allwood, from the finance team, for this section.

Councillor Weaver was invited to make an opening statement after which Officers provided their presentation to Members.

The Chairperson invited questions, comments and observations from Members.

Members noted, and welcomed, the substantial increase in budget proposed for Adult Services for 2023-24, but were concerned that despite the substantial increase,

Adult Services are still projecting to use £2.309m of earmarked reserves in 2023-24. Members recognised that the use of earmarked reserves was planned but were still concerned that Adult Services may still face financial difficulties despite this proposed increase in budget.

Members were somewhat perplexed that given the recognised challenges and demands Adult Services face which provide the reasoning for their substantial increase in budget, they are projecting an underspend of £1.820m as of Month 9. Members were informed the reason for this underspend was due to difficulties with recruitment in a timely manner and increased use of grant funding.

A key area of concern for the committee related to the employee implications of the proposed 2023-2024 budget (*total net FTE reduction of 172.9*). Members voiced a number of reservations regarding the impact the removal of these posts would have on the resilience of service areas, the implications for remaining staff, service delivery and the overall pressure this would place on the authority.

Members noted that FTE reduction, whether it be through vacant posts or voluntary severance would undoubtedly impact resilience of service areas and the authority as a whole, and the relatively high number of FTE reduction can be attributed to the current financial context and overall budget gap this council is facing. Members were assured that when employee implications are present in efficiency savings, it is assessed that the removal of these posts will have no impact on service delivery. Members welcomed the offer of more information on the 22.5 FTE posts categorised as 'TBC / Redeployment'.

Members sought clarity on the overall costing implications of voluntary severance, exploring how short-term costing against long term saving is determined. Members noted there was an initial cost commitment with money set aside for voluntary severance payments, however they in turn provide an ongoing base-budget saving, year after year.

Members highlighted the release of the £10million covid-19 budget and sought clarity on how it has been utilised to address the overall budget gap. Officers advised that this money has been realigned and offered to service areas facing significant financial pressures.

Regarding the Capital Programme, Members explored and questioned the council's overall reliance on grant funding – raising concerns around risks and sustainability. Members noted the admission that reliance on grants does pose some risk, however, grant funding for capital investment has been a feature of local authority funding for many years with Cabinet Members and officers closely determining the use of grants based on intelligence and affordability, with other capital investments also pursued in the programme.

Cllr Sangani – Cabinet Member for Public Health & Equalities

The Chairperson welcomed Councillor Julie Sangani, Cabinet Member for Public Health & Equalities, Sarah McGill, Jane Thomas, and Helen Evans to the meeting.

Councillor Sangani was invited to make an opening statement, after which Members were asked for their questions, comments, and observations.

Committee Members were pleased to see the proposal surrounding blood pressure loan schemes within the 2023/24 FRM and sought clarity on the proposals intended arrangements. Officers advised that the scheme would be a pilot and Members wished to stress the importance that thorough consideration is applied to location of this equipment, given that not all Cardiff residents live close to hubs, and the need to ensure mitigation measures are in place to avoid instances where equipment is not returned.

Members asked for more information on the efficiency saving proposal titled 'Ukraine Refugees and Asylum Seeker' and were informed costings would be offset against the Ukrainian scheme.

Cllr Norma Mackie – Cabinet Member for Adult Service

The Chairperson welcomed Councillor Norma Mackie, Cabinet Member for Adult Services who joined Jane and Sarah for this item.

Councillor Mackie was invited to make an opening statement after which Officers provided their presentation to Members.

The Chairperson invited questions, comments, and observations from Members.

Members were assured that little to no impact of the service users will be at the forefront of this proposal, the confirmation that individuals would not be required to move home, and the recognition on the need to ensure a phased approach for changes in personnel (support workers).

Though this proposal relates to working with third sector organisations who already hold an established relationship with the council, given the current context, Members questioned this feasibility given the financial pressures and recruitment issues they too will also face. Officers advise that, initial conversations have been held with the third sector partners who have provided assurance they have the ability and capacity to effectively, and sensitively, manage this proposal.

Members noted within this service change proposal, 37 FTE posts have requested voluntary redundancy. In line with the ongoing concern around recruitment and retention, Members raised what this indicates around work conditions, as this suggests a high number of individuals may sadly no longer wish to work in this vocation and are unable to be retained.

When considering the overall efficiency savings proposed for Adult Services, committee Members noted a significant number have been categorised as 'amber-green' for achievability, with the service change proposal categorised as 'amber-red'. Members sought insight on the deliverability of implementing a volume of proposals which contain a level of uncertainty. Members were informed the 'red-amber' classification for the service change proposal largely relates to timescales, and the efficiency savings proposed align to the service area's strategic direction and ongoing work; thereby reducing its risk and strengthening its deliverability.

Regarding the draft Corporate Plan, Members explored resource levels in terms of the commitment for '*modernising our home care services to provide a full reablement service and short-term emergency care*'. Although Members noted that difficulties in recruitment were still present, they were pleased to be informed of the positive steps being taken to address challenges, such as an increase in wages and changes to staff rotas.

Members noted the recognition in the draft Corporate Plan, that all council staff require access to an appropriate level of training to meet the needs of autistic people, however there was an absence of KPI's measuring the performance of this commitment. Members noted that delivery of this commitment is monitored and recorded in the service area's Directorate Delivery Plan.

Cllr Peter Bradbury – Tackling Poverty and Supporting Young People

The Chairperson welcomed Councillor Peter Bradbury, Cabinet Member for Tackling Poverty and Supporting Young People for this item.

Councillor Bradbury was invited to make an opening statement, after which Members were asked for any questions, comments or observations.

Members noted the level of funding allocated to his portfolio, although welcomed, raises concerns around sustainability. Members raised the concern advice staff hold over job certainty, as a high level are on temporary contracts. Members were informed that although a level of grant funding is always present, and the service area benefits from a dedicated BID writer to ensure a consistent external income stream, work is ongoing toward making some positions permanent through grant funding. In addition, work is also ongoing toward providing staff who are on temporary contracts with assurances to alleviate uncertainties around job security.

Members noted that sadly demand for financial support is rising and sought explanation as why the 2022/23 FRM allocation for the advice team and into work services had not been utilised, Members were informed this was due to the money being replaced by the Shared Prosperity Fund.

In terms of the proposed efficiency savings (£90,000), Members noted this was due to the implementation of Universal Credit which in turn lessens the caseload for Housing Benefit assessment thus allowing the release of staff.

Given the current context, Members noted the recognition that third sector organisations are under considerable financial and capacity pressures, and sought assurance this is, and would continue, to be taken into account within our partnership work. Members were informed reliance on the third sector within the field of advice has subsided over recent years, with increased in-house work. However, partnership work is continuously reviewed and assessed, with these considerations at the forefront. Members highlighted the need to ensure we as a council recognise and support third sector organisations who offer support to specific vulnerable groups, as such groups may not feel comfortable approaching the council, and instead wish to receive support through dedicated organisations. Members noted from Cllr

Bradbury's response that he feels this is in place and welcomed his offer of showing the committee organisations who demonstrate such work.

Regarding the Corporate Plan, Members were pleased to be informed targets in relation to the number of people being assisted with support for benefits and the money provided have been realigned in line with the current output of the team.

Cllr Thorne – Housing & Communities

The Chairperson welcomed Councillor Lynda Thorne, Cabinet Member for Housing & Communities for this item.

Councillor Thorne was invited to make an opening statement, Officers provided a presentation and Members were asked for their questions, comments, and observations.

Regarding the service change proposal, Members explored whether the volunteers would have a set job description, and be offered a contract, which would detail the number of hours of work requested from them, offering a degree of certainty for the volunteer and staff members. Officers advised contracted hours had not yet been considered as the ethos centres around 'giving what you can'. However, a job description would be provided and in terms of hours provided, restrictions may apply depending on if the individual is in receipt of benefits. The service area would look to work closely with the Department for Work and Pensions to ascertain the level of hours that can be provided.

The specific concerns raised around this proposal related to implications on service users and staff members should a volunteer not be able to fulfil their role. Members were informed of the intention that volunteers would be able to select opportunities via the job descriptions available on the website, thereby potentially offering expertise, and it was intended they would undertake 'light touch help' to allow staff members to give more dedicated, in-depth advice. This in turn, should lessen risk and implication for staff members.

Members noted the use of 'organised volunteers' is already present in some hubs, who are recognised as offering excellent work and events. Given the current financial climate, Members were also pleased to note that 62 Into Work Service volunteers (99%) have moved on to permanent work, along with the other benefits outlined at the meeting such as providing individuals with new skills, and improvement to individual wellbeing.

With regard to the proposed Youth Hub, Members sought an update on its progress and were informed officers are currently working to ensure there are no planning restrictions or technical issues with the identified site. Members looked forward to monitoring the development of this work.

In terms of the Corporate Plan, Members sought explanation on why the yearly target for the development of new house builds has been replaced with a cumulative target. Although the response around external factors influencing yearly targets for this programme of work was both noted and understood, given the importance and acute need for social housing in the city, it was felt an annual target which allows for clear

insight into the trajectory of this programme was of significance and Members considered that the annual target could be reinstated either within the Corporate Plan, or the service area's Directorate Delivery Plan.

Members explored the £200,000 allocation for Neighbourhood Regeneration Scheme in the 2023/24 FRM and agreed with Cllr Thorne on the importance of regenerating local communities, particularly in the vein of how it can help address issues of ASB. Members sought further information on how Councillors can make bids into the Neighbourhood Renewal Scheme, including timescales on when bids must be made.

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.

45 : URGENT ITEMS (IF ANY)

None received.

46 : DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Monday 20th March at 2:00pm

The meeting terminated at 4.20 pm