

CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE BUDGET MONITORING PANEL NOTES – 24 February 2016

Panel Members in Attendance – Councillors, Cook, Murphy and Thorne

The Panel held its third meeting on 24 February to review and evaluate the recently published month 9 budget monitoring Cabinet report and associated documents. The meeting was held in advance of the March Committee meeting to enable Members to identify any issues which they wish to scrutinise in detail and develop any lines of inquiry they may wish to report to Committee at its meeting on 15 March.

The Members were provided with copies of the Education and Lifelong Learning and Children's Services financial information from the Month 9 Budget Monitoring Cabinet report, which included an update on 2015/16 budget savings, and an update on the outstanding 2014/15 savings proposals dated 18 February. Members were also provided with copy of the Finance response to the calculation of the budget realignment for Children's Services budget for 2016/17.

The papers enabled the Members to analyse the key areas of spending in Children's Services and Education, as well as their progress in achieving the savings agreed by Council in February. Members also discussed the comments added to the budget savings table explaining the Directorates' progress being made in achieving the agreed savings.

The Director of Social Services was invited to comment on a number of issues highlighted in the Month 9 savings matrix, and expand on some of the comments that Finance had put into the budget matrix. The Head of Performance, Resources and Services for Education was also invited to expand on a number of issues highlighted in the Month 6 savings matrix, and expand on some of the comments that Finance had put into the budget matrix.

Children's Services

The Director explained that Children's Services is a high risk area and any budget restrictions must not impact on the safeguarding of children. As such the Budget monitoring of the Directorate's savings has to take into account any funding implications arising for the safeguarding of any child, some of which can be very resource intensive.

In response to the questions raised, the Director explained the follow:

Work was being undertaken to identify alternative accommodation to the Youth Offending Service (Penhill) and Looked After Children Service (Suffolk House). Both

locations were becoming unfit for the operation of the services and alternative accommodation was being sourced. The Members stated that savings could be made by transferring these services to new premises, and provide an improved service for young people and staff. Members requested that plans should be developed as soon as possible to enable the services to move to more appropriate accommodation in the near future.

Members also expressed some anxiety around the continued increase in cost of accommodating looked after children, at month 9 there had been a projected overspend of £2,188,000 and this was after a re-alignment of the budget to the value of £2,400,000. The Director of Social Services explained a number of activities which were being undertaken to help manage the cost of accommodating Looked After Children, including the South East Wales Improvement Collaborative and the All Wales Purchasing framework. There was also a joint project officer to work with Cardiff and the Vale to look at out of county placements. The Director also explained that all cases were placed by the Court and many of the cases were very complex. Members also noted that the Early Intervention Scheme would in the long run help reduce the number of Looked After Children.

The Members requested a list of all Out of County Placements (by area) and suggested that the Committee should undertake a short investigation in to the cost of placements, by looking at “a pen picture” of the cost of say 10 Looked After Children cases.

Education

Neil Hardee attended the meeting on behalf of the Director of Education to explain the Directorate’s Financial Position as at Month 9 and to answer any of the Members’ questions.

Members were informed that the Month 9 budgetary monitoring projection was still for a balanced budget at the end of the year, although it might improve further. Members also heard that the Catering budget was expected to make a small surplus, which the Directorate was hoping could be transferred to the Catering reserve. This reserve was set up to fund the biometric school meal system for all Primary Schools. It was anticipated that if this year’s catering surplus could be added to the reserve, sufficient funds would then be available to implement the new system in all Primary schools next year. Members considered this to be an excellent plan and recommended that the reserve should be topped up and the Biometric system be implemented during 2016/17.

Following consideration of all the information, the Panel agreed to recommend that the Committee

- Informs the Education and Resources Directorate that any surplus made by the School Catering Service must be transferred to the School Catering Reserve, and that reserve be utilised during this financial year to introduce Biometric School Meal system to all Primary Schools.

And enable the Panel to:

- Hold further budget monitoring meetings following the publication of Month 12 Budget Monitoring Reports;
- To receive a progress briefing on the accommodation of the Youth offending Service and Looked After Children Service at the next Budget Panel meeting;
- Undertake a short investigation into the cost of accommodating Looked After Children; and
- Receive a progress report on the implementation of Biometric school meals system at the next Budget Panel Meeting.

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Principal Scrutiny Officer
29 February 2016