

**CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND EDUCATION SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE**

(Committee Rooms 1 and 2, Port Talbot)

Members Present: **12 November 2015**

Chairperson: Councillor A.R.Lockyer

Vice Chairperson: Councillor H.N.James

Councillors: A.Carter, M.Ellis, P.Greenaway, J.D.Morgan,
Mrs.S.Paddison, Mrs.K.Pearson, M.Protheroe,
A.L.Thomas, D.Whitelock and Mrs.L.G.Williams

**Co-opted Non Voting
Members:** A.Hughes

**Officers In
Attendance** A.Evans, A.Jarrett, C.Millis, Ms.C.Gadd and
Mrs.J.Woodman-Ralph

Cabinet Invitees: Councillors P.A.Rees and P.D.Richards

1. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST FROM MEMBERS**

The following Co-opted Non Voting Member made a declaration of interest at the commencement of the meeting.

A.Hughes: Report of the Director of Education, Leisure and Lifelong Learning, the Head of Participation and the Head of Transformation re: Consultation on Education, Leisure and Lifelong Learning Services Budget and Draft Savings 2016/17 - ELLL 617 Review of the Music Service Subsidy, as his daughter is joint manager of the Music Service.

2. **CONSULTATION ON SOCIAL SERVICES BUDGET AND DRAFT SAVINGS 2016/17 TO 2019/20**

The Committee received the report on the consultation of Children and Young People's Services Budget Draft Savings 2016/17 to 2019/20, as detailed within the circulated report.

Members were informed that the Service was on target to achieve a reduction of 26 looked after children, which would yield a saving of approximately £700k for this financial year. It was highlighted that there were four main areas of expenditure in the Service – staff costs, operational, looked after children and care leavers. There were limited areas where cuts could be made, for example it would be counterproductive to reduce staff or support services.

SSHH 601 – One of the savings proposals for the Service was for Hillside Secure Unit to move to full cost recovery. Members were informed that the Unit intend on increasing revenue through greater numbers of welfare placements. It was noted that the Youth Justice Board had reduced the number of remand placements. Members queried if there was currently any cost to the Council in running Hillside and if there were not how would savings be made. Officers confirmed that there was not a cost to the Council and income generation would contribute to the savings.

SSHH 603 – identify the savings that would be made by reducing the number of looked after children. The Service had identified that there was further scope to reduce the number of looked after children, it was recognised that this would have to be done safely and not refusing children who required looking after. Members were informed that safeguards had been put in place to ensure that only those that needed to be looked after would be. Members noted that it would be impossible to know the demand for services and how many children would need to be taken into care. It was recognised that a good prediction could be made, however, it was queried that if there was a surge towards the end of the year that took the service over budget would the deficit be carried over to the next year and recouped in future years. Officers informed them that they accepted that the number of looked after children was variable, but there were preventative measures in place to prevent a steep increase. The Service was confident that the targets would be met.

Members asked if there were enough support services for families to be able to meet demand. It was highlighted that it would be difficult to

ever have enough support services as there was a variety of services required and it was important to balance services and finance. It was noted that there was a robust framework of services in place. One area that the Service wanted to concentrate on was reducing the need to use agency and out of county foster carers. It was highlighted that more foster carers needed to be recruited especially for older children with complex needs.

It was noted that if additional savings were made in the Service then consideration would be given to the best way of reinvesting the money. It was highlighted that early intervention and prevention work should also reduce the number of children in need.

Members highlighted that there could be a surge in the amount of children that require looking after and that the income generation in Hillside was reliant on welfare beds being filled. In light of these variables Members queried if there were any other options for savings in the Service and officers informed them that any alternatives would include reducing staff and cutting family support services.

Members highlighted that the Council had made a commitment to try and prevent any compulsory redundancies and queried if this was not the case would officers have made the same budget proposals. Officers informed them that a lot of work had been undertaken to ensure that the workforce was stable and it would be counterproductive to cut staff.

Following scrutiny, it was agreed that the report be noted.

3. **CONSULTATION ON EDUCATION, LEISURE AND LIFELONG LEARNING SERVICES BUDGET AND DRAFT SAVINGS 2016/17 AND 2017/18**

The Committee received the report on the consultation on Education, Leisure and Lifelong Learning Services Budget and Draft Savings 2016/17 and 2017/18, as detailed within the circulated report.

Members were reminded of the background to the budget proposals and that the report contained proposals that were being consulted on and no decisions had been made. It was highlighted that the position taken by the Council was to protect the most vulnerable learners and the services that had to be prioritised were those that were statutory

services and services subject to inspection. It was noted that Estyn would be starting a new round of Local Authority inspections during 2017/2018 and it was anticipated that Neath Port Talbot would be one of the first to be inspected.

It was highlighted that the largest budget was delegated to schools and there was only a limited budget that savings could be made from. It was noted that the Directorate received some grant funding and there was criteria around how this money was spent. Where possible, opportunities were identified for core activities to be offset against grants for savings to be made.

It was noted that savings proposals ELLL 608, 609 and 610 were linked and aimed to secure improved performance. ELLL 608 – NPT Works – it was explained that it was an activity funded by the Department of Works and Pensions to assist those identified by the Job Centre to improve their confidence and employability skills. The Service had outperformed original targets that enabled it to become self-funding. Members queried how savings would be made if the service was grant funded. It was explained that the Council also subsidised the service and there were targets that had to be met. The service could generate income to ensure no subsidy was required.

ELLL 609 – Skills and Training Unit – This Unit delivered a range of activities for post 16 education and was part of the consortium managed by Neath Port Talbot College. It was noted that the contracts would be retendered in 2016 to ensure maximisation of funding. Members queried if the contracts were ending in July 2016 and officers confirmed that the contracts cycle ran from August to August and would check when the tendering process would be beginning.

ELLL 610 – Adult Community Learning – It was highlighted that savings would be achieved by expanding the current portfolio of services and contracts. Members queried if this service could be undertaken in partnership with other organisations such as Neath Port Talbot College. Officers informed them that this option had been explored, however, funding had been cut and it was not viable. It was explained that the College did get direct funding from Welsh Government which was used to franchise out certain courses. The Council's Community Education Unit was one of the main providers. However, the Service does not know at the beginning of the financial year how many courses it would be requested to run, which makes it difficult to plan services. It was highlighted that other funding sources

were considered for running courses, such as courses for Communities First.

ELLL 612 – Regional Learning Partnership – It was explained that this saving would be achieved through the removal of the Council's contribution to the Partnership. Members queried if the Partnership was part of the Education through Regional Working (ERW) consortium. They were informed that it was not and it was a partnership that had originally been developed with European funding. It was felt that there would not be a significant disadvantage to the Council withdrawing from it. It was noted that Welsh Government was considering making adult learning regional.

It was noted that ELLL 611- Co-locating of Services in Tir Morfa and 614 – Relocate Youth Service into Tir Morfa were linked. Members queried whether any young people would be disadvantaged, for example, by having further to travel. Officers explained that this would not be the case as the building would be the base for the service worked out of but they would still be delivering services across the County Borough. It was highlighted that services that target vulnerable young people would be prioritised, such as the Relationship Advice Drop in Service (RADS). Members asked if the state of the building in Tir Morfa was up to standard and would the Services have to be relocated again. Officers informed them that this was unknown and would be included in the Corporate Accommodation Strategy. Although some improvements had been made to the building. Members also queried if the costs of the relocation had been included in proposals and it was confirmed that they were.

ELLL 615 – Reduction in Youth Service budget – was also linked to 614 as the moving of the service would assist with the savings for this budget. It was noted that the statutory obligation in regards to youth services was to provide adequate provision and it was a substantial part of the non-delegated budget. Members queried if the reduction in premises costs was not a duplication of the relocation savings identified in ELLL 614. Officers confirmed that it was not duplication. Members asked if the Rolling Zone would be kept and officers informed them that it would not continue. It was noted that it had been a successful way to deliver services and provided an element of equity in service delivery. Members asked what would happen to the bus and did the Council own it. They were informed that the bus was leased and the lease was coming to an end. Some Members felt that the Rolling Zone was a luxury and other Members felt that it was a

necessity for some areas with no youth clubs. It was noted that the opening of some youth clubs would also be reduced and the efficiency of some youth clubs also had to be considered.

It was noted that the Youth Service was trying to secure European funding on a regional basis, which was being led by Pembrokeshire Council, to undertake similar activities to the ENGAGE project. Members requested that it was ensured that in agreeing the project that all Councils would have to meet their allocation of the costs.

Members expressed concern that the Duke of Edinburgh programme would reduce its operational budget as well as increasing income, especially as the Local Authority was a high performing Authority in this area. It was highlighted that if schools had to undertake full cost recovery it could disadvantage some pupils, as some families would be unable to afford to put their children on the programme.

It was highlighted that there would be additional pressures to school budgets, however, there were not cuts in the delegated budget given to schools. It was noted that other Councils were looking at having to reduce delegated schools budget. Members had concerns that savings were not made by moving costs from one budget to another. It was highlighted that there was less movement of costs in these proposals than in previous years. It was also noted that there were tolerances in school budgets and overall there was a £2.9m reserve across schools. It was recognised that some schools had surpluses and others had deficits. It was noted that schools would have to prioritise where funding was spent.

ELLL 616 – School Cleaning – it was explained that full cost recovery would be secured from primary and special schools, because currently cleaning was subsidised. The Committee asked what the effect would be on the schools and the average additional cost per school. Officers informed them that the average cost per school would be £2k and it would vary from school to school depending on size as costs were calculated based on square metres. Members queried if schools were obligated to use the Council's cleaning services or if they were able to opt out. It was explained that they could opt out and use a different company, however, they would not recommend that schools did this. It was likely that it could result in additional costs to schools due to the cleaning companies having to comply with all relevant regulations. Members asked if there was a minimum standard that had to be adhered to and it was confirmed that they would have to comply with health and safety standards.

However, the Department would consider implementing standards in case any school chose to use external cleaners. Members asked if a service level agreement could be established between schools and a cleaning company and it was explained that it was unlikely that this would generate any savings. It was highlighted that secondary schools arrange their own cleaning as this had never been undertaken in house by the Council.

ELLL 617 – Review Music Service Subsidy - A.Hughes reaffirmed his interest and left the meeting for this item only.

Members were informed that a review of the music service was being undertaken. It was currently a joint service arrangement with the City and County of Swansea. It was noted that Swansea were considering removing the entire subsidy for Swansea schools in financial year 2016/17. It was highlighted that the current subsidy was £270k for Neath Port Talbot. It was explained that the service had grown organically and it was a difficult area to untangle. Some staff were employed by Neath Port Talbot Council and some were employed by the City and County of Swansea and the staff work across the two areas in different disciplines. There was not an equitable spread in each area of teachers for different instruments. It had been proposed to phase out the subsidy gradually, however, Swansea had taken a different stance which would have an impact. It was confirmed that officers in Neath Port Talbot were in discussions with the Music Service and Swansea Council over this future of the service. Neath Port Talbot were considering the viability of running a single service but it was a complicated process. There were several issues including human resources and the key risks were being examined. Members expressed concern over future joint working where complications such as these occur.

Members were supportive of maintaining a music service, if possible, and it was recognised that it had assisted with huge successes in the area. It was asked if it was viable for the service to be closed and a new service rebuilt. It was highlighted that this option would be considered as part of the review. However, there were existing staff and equipment to consider across both Neath Port Talbot and Swansea. It was noted that not all the staff were paid on the same scale as the service had developed over a number of years and there were different roles. It was also noted that there were differences in hourly costs paid by schools. Members queried whether there was any potential for European funding to be utilised by the Service and

they were informed that the managers were considering all options such as this.

Members asked if there was any evidence of the educational outcomes to teaching music. It was explained that there were figures on the amount of children who take up music and the level they achieve. It was highlighted that 80% of children who undertake GCSE, AS and A Levels in music were prepared for the practical element by the Music Service. There was also research on the additional positive impacts music had on children's learning, an example was given where it helps pupils to learn computer programming. Members suggested that there may be some funding through the Sports Council for Wales and this would be explored by officers. Members noted that bringing the Service in house could result in access being more equitable. It was confirmed that a report the review would be brought back to a future meeting of the Committee.

It was highlighted that ELLL 618 – Review of Specific Grants and ELLL 623 Base Budget Reduction in the School Improvement Service were linked. Members were informed that the Service benefited from around £10m in grants, such as the Education Improvement and Think Families grants. It was explained that an element of the grants included administration costs and there were opportunities to fund core post which would relieve some budget pressures for a short period without diluting services to schools. The Committee asked if ELLL 623 would impact on the money given by the Council to ERW. It was explained that this was a set sum that was agreed by all the Councils involved and could not be changed.

ELLL 619 – Management and Administration Review – Members were informed that savings would be achieved through a review of the current staff structure. It was noted the early retirement and voluntary redundancy scheme had closed this week. There had been a number of expressions of interests received which would be considered on a case by case basis. The Committee asked if the Council's Early Retirement and Voluntary Redundancy Scheme would be the same for schools. Officers informed them that it would be a different scheme for schools. Members queried whether or not further efficiencies would be made in this area. Officers informed them that the management section was as lean as possible.

Members highlighted that the Council had made a commitment to try and prevent any compulsory redundancies and queried if this was not

the case would officers have made the same budget proposals. Officers confirmed that yes there would be the same budget proposals as the strategic position was to protect the most vulnerable.

ELLL 621 – Full cost recovery of minibus insurance for schools – it was recognised that this would put additional pressures on school budgets.

ELLL 622 – Out of County Placements – Members were informed that it was envisaged that there would be savings as some of the pupils would be reaching the age of 19 and would no longer be attending school. Members queried how many children were placed out of county and it was explained that there were not many and their needs could not be met within the county. It was highlighted that it was at significant cost to the Council. Members queried if a facility could be set up in Wales to meet the needs of Welsh children and it was confirmed that this had been considered previously and any developments in this area would be reported to Members.

ELLL 625 – Secure efficiencies in the Education Welfare and Family Support Services – It was highlighted that Manager of Support for Inclusion would be retiring at the end of the year and the current service would be restructured accordingly. Members recognised the work that had undertaken throughout his career and that he would be missed.

ELLL 624 – School Catering – it was highlighted that savings would be achieved through continually reviewing the service and securing further operational efficiencies. Members noted that this could result in additional costs to some families and there were other demands on them including decreases in working tax credits. Officers highlighted that the price was quite competitive compared with similar Local Authorities and uptake in schools was high. It was asked if there would be an increase in Free School Meal funding from Welsh Government. Officers highlighted that it would be included in the RSG and it would be checked if it would cover any increased cost of meals. Members asked if the increased cost of school meals would be brought back as part of 2017/18 financial plan proposals and it was confirmed they would be. It was requested that an Equality Impact Assessment was undertaken at the relevant time for any proposed increase.

ELLL 626 – Welsh Translation Service – Members were informed that savings would be achieved by introducing a charge for services that were not previously charged for. Members asked if further charges would be brought in 2017/18 as the same savings had been identified for that financial year. Officers explained that there would not be and it was a growing business that was developing to become more marketable in a phased approach. Members suggested that the wording for the 2017/18 proposed savings was changed to reflect this.

It was highlighted that the closure of Primary Schools this year were not included in the Forward Financial Plan savings. It was explained that these were not savings and had not be advertised as such. The costs were recycled into the delegated schools budget as reinvestment.

Members noted that the proposed savings in the report did not add up to the total savings required. Officers informed them that some of the savings would also be rolled over from savings identified last year.

Members highlighted that Home to School transport was included in the budget proposals to continue to rationalise routes as per the previously agreed policy. It was queried when the report on the access arrangements for the Welsh in Education Strategic Plan would be reported back to the Committee. Officers informed them that they had met with Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) and a report would be presented in the new year. It was confirmed that those that currently had transport would do for the rest of their statutory schooling.

Members requested a report on the capacity of the Minority Ethnic Achievement Support (MEAS) service to meet demand, especially with the potential new influx due to refugees being settled in the area, to be put on the forward work programme.

Following scrutiny, it was agreed that the report be noted.

CHAIRPERSON