

**CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND EDUCATION SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE (SPECIAL)**

(Council Chamber - Port Talbot Civic Centre)

Members Present: **17 October 2016**

Chairperson: **Councillor H.N.James**

Councillors: M.Ellis, R.G.Jones, Mrs.K.Pearson,
M.Protheroe, A.L.Thomas, D.Whitelock and
Mrs.L.G.Williams

**Co-opted Voting
Members:** Mrs.M.Caddick and Ms.D.Vaughan

**Co-opted Non Voting
Members:** R.De Benedictis and A.Hughes

**Officers In
Attendance** N. Jarman, A.Jarrett, A.Thomas and Ms.C.Gadd

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

1. **CONSULTATION ON SOCIAL SERVICES BUDGET AND DRAFT
SAVINGS 2017/18**

The Committee received supplementary information concerning the savings proposals for the Social Services Budget, set out in the Cabinet Report of 28 September 2016, as detailed within the circulated report.

Members were provided with the background to the Council's Forward Financial Plan proposals up to March 2020. It was explained that the Children and Young People Services budget forms part of the broader Social Services budget, which had large savings to be made. It was noted that there had been significant investment into early intervention and preventative work that should result in some savings happening organically. It was highlighted that there were no new savings proposals for 2017/18 for Children and Young People Services and remained SSHH 540 – Savings arising from ongoing reductions in looked After Children. It was noted that if austerity

measures continued then the scope for identifying savings in Children's Services was limited.

It was explained that the four main areas of expenditure in the Service were staff costs, operational, Looked After Children and Leaving Care. It was highlighted that a lot of resources had been spent on ensuring that the structure and stability of the workforce was right. The support services were also important to ensure that the Service ran effectively and it would not be of benefit to make cuts in these areas. It was identified that the area where savings could be made was by safely reducing the number of Looked After Children.

Officers highlighted that the number of Looked After Children had been significantly reduced last financial year and the Service was on track to reach its target for this year. It was proposed that for 2017/18 to further reduce the number of Looked After Children by 23. Officers explained that the savings made would also depend on the placement type as some placements were more expensive than others, for example foster carers for teenagers were paid at a higher rate. It was noted that there were 10 children placed in residential accommodation and the Service would be looking at rehabilitating them back into specialist foster care. It was highlighted that as the Service progresses and there were lower numbers of Looked After Children then it would be more difficult to find future savings.

Members noted that out of county placements were very expensive, however, some concern was expressed about whether or not the needs of those children and young people would be met in county. Officers explained that the children who were in settled placements would not be brought back, efforts would be focussed on those that were not in stable placements and where the Service was confident that their needs could be met.

Members highlighted that all areas were struggling with financial cuts and asked what potential future areas could contribute to the Forward Financial Plan. Officers noted that in slicing parts of Services there was a risk that they could go wrong and it had to be ensured that the numbers of Looked After Children did not start to increase. Therefore cross directorate savings would need to be considered. It was highlighted that Adult and Children's Services had been working more closely together and this had been a benefit of having the same head of service covering both areas for an interim period. An example was given of improvements in the transition of young people from Children's to Adult Services.

Members asked about potential changes to Complex Needs Services. It was noted that this area of work was specific to Adult Social Care and it was a difficult area to target. Future reports would be brought to the relevant Committee regarding this.

The Committee queried the figures for 2017/18 in the table outlining the funding gap as they did not seem to add up. Officers noted that it was a corporate table and would query this with the Finance Section and circulate a response to Members. The Committee also asked what the one off budget allocation to Streetscene was. Officers explained that the Streetscene section came under the Environment Directorate and due to the budget settlement last year being better than expected a one off contribution had been allocated to them.

Members noted that under workforce impacts the report referred to trade unions and staff briefings and asked if this was in regards to the Early Retirement and Voluntary Redundancy Scheme. Officers explained that it was not in reference to this scheme as Children and Young People Services were not accepting requests under this scheme to ensure workforce stability. It was highlighted that trade unions were involved in the corporate discussions regarding the Forward Financial Plan.

Members asked if the Welsh Government settlement for the Council was better than expected would the same savings be made. It was highlighted that it would be up to Council to make that decision, however, the proposals put forward by Children and Young People Services were also the best options for the Service.

The Cabinet Member for Children and Young people thanked the Senior Management of the Service for meeting the savings previously identified and was confident that the challenges would be met going forward.

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

2. CONSULTATION ON EDUCATION, LEISURE AND LIFELONG LEARNING BUDGET AND DRAFT SAVINGS 2017/18

The Committee received the supplementary information concerning the savings proposals for the Education, Leisure and Lifelong Learning Budget, set out in the Cabinet Report of 28 September

2016, with a view to aiding the scrutiny of those proposals, as detailed within the circulated report.

Members were provided with more details of the specific proposals for the Services that were under the remit of this Committee. It was highlighted that some items had been agreed in previous Financial Plans and the additional detail was only in relation to new proposals.

ELLL 701 – Schools – Members were informed that savings were to be achieved by reducing schools' delegated budgets by 1%. It was noted that for schools with a deficit reserve position there was a risk of a detrimental impact on standards. Members asked if there had been any investigation for the redistribution of reserves across schools. It was noted that the Welsh Government considered excessive reserves for schools to be £50k for primary schools and £100k for secondary schools. However, Officers highlighted that the size of a school had to be taken into consideration. Officers explained that there were rules regarding the clawing back of reserves from schools. The Council would have to firstly write to the Governors to say how they wanted the school to spend the money over a specific time. After this process, and if the school had not spent the money as requested, then the reserves could be recovered by the Council. This money would then have to be spent on education services.

Officers highlighted that there were only a couple of schools with what the Service would class as excessive reserves. Members asked if the implementing clawing back reserves from these schools were being considered. Officers explained that the priority had been to work with schools that had deficits and signed agreements had been put in place with those schools. The Service would now begin to have discussions with schools with large reserves. It was noted that some schools would be reluctant to spend their reserves as there were risks of further cuts to funding, for example to the Pupil Deprivation Grant, and schools needed to safeguard against such cuts.

Members queried what happened to the reserves of the schools that had been combined under the Strategic School Improvement Programme. Officers explained that there were financial regulations that had to be adhered to in relation to this and all reserves had to be paid back to the Local Authority. However, the Service ensured that the new school received the equivalent money back in their opening balance.

Members asked if schools that were in deficit would have to lose staff to bring their budgets back inline. Officers accepted that schools would have to make staffing adjustments to accommodate budget gaps. The Service considered pupil projections and schools with a deficit position had a three year plan to manage the process. It was noted that the School Funding Formula Review would have an impact and Members highlighted that it would be disappointing if the Review did not take place. Members noted that for schools that were not in deficit and did not have large reserves the 1% cut would have a big impact. Members asked how many schools were in a deficit position. Officers informed them that there were seven primary schools and four secondary schools, however, two of the secondary schools had now closed so there was an improvement this year. It was noted that all of the schools in deficit had an agreed recovery plan.

Members asked if the Committee would receive a report on the impact school closures have had. Officers explained that the benefits had been seen but it was difficult to quantify it in monetary terms. However, all savings had gone back into Education Services and if the changes had not been made then the financial position would be worse. It was noted that all replacement schools had resulted in at least a neutral impact. It was asked if the sale of land that schools had been located went back into the Education budget and Officers confirmed that this was the case.

Members noted that there were going to be additional pressures on schools with such increases as energy costs and was there an estimated overall total amount of budget demands that schools would be facing. Officers explained that inflationary price increases were built into budget planning and all services were facing these issues.

ELLL 702 – Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) - Members were informed that the Local Authority paid for some DBS checks for some schools and it was no longer sustainable.

Members asked if the schools would have to pay for DBS checks for Local Authority appointed governors, as it would not be fair to pass this cost onto schools. Officers clarified that governors were volunteers and therefore not charged for DBS checks. Members raised concerns about discussions regarding charging for DBS checks for volunteers and Officers noted that this would have to be addressed at the time. Members asked why DBS checks were paid for some schools and not others. It was explained that it was a historic arrangement.

ELLL 703 – subsidies of Cleaning Services -Members were informed that the Council subsidises the cleaning of some school and it was no longer sustainable, so the full cost would be passed onto schools. It was noted that there was a risk that schools may decide to purchase their cleaning service from external contractors and this would have an impact on the internal cleaning service. It was noted that the current subsidy was £76K for primary and special schools. Secondary schools did not use the internal cleaning services.

Members highlighted that with the budget cuts that schools were facing they were likely to investigate if they could make significant savings by outsourcing cleaning. The Committee raised concerns that schools not opting for the in house service would result in job losses. Members were also concerned about the levels of cleanliness and schools meeting health and safety regulations and other legalities. Officers agreed that these were risks and the Service could become a commissioner rather than a provider. It was noted that checks would have to be undertaken for schools that outsourced their cleaning and there was already a supervisory role within the in house service that undertook termly checks. It would have to be made clear to schools that they would be charged for inspections.

Some Members felt that there were safeguarding implications and queried whether it would be a saving in the longer term. Some Members highlighted that secondary schools already outsourced their cleaning so the checks and policies must already be in place for primary schools to be able to replicate if they wished to use an external company.

It was highlighted that the withdrawal of the subsidy for cleaning services had been a proposal in the last budget consultation, but there had been extra money found to fund half the subsidy. Officers explained that the Service had to protect the most vulnerable and prioritise statutory services.

Members queried who was responsible for cleaning rooms in schools that were used for pre-school services. Officers would find out this information and respond directly to the relevant Member.

ELLL 704 – Out of County Placements – Members were informed that this would be achieved by reducing the number of placements. It was explained that the children with out of county placements had complex needs and some of those needs could now be met by

provisions in Neath Port Talbot. It was noted that this was a positive step.

ELLL 705 – Vacancy Management – Members were informed that this saving would be achieved by closely monitoring whether or not posts needed to be replaced. It was highlighted that this exercise had been ongoing for a number of years and there were not many posts that could not be replaced.

ELLL 710 – Grant funding – It was noted that the Service always adhered to the grant conditions, as well as looking for opportunities to reduce core costs, for example in terms of administration.

ELLL 712 – Special Educational Needs (SEN) Budget – Members were informed that this related to the costs of one member of staff in one school and it would not come into effect until September 2017. It was noted that there had been some confusion in the way this had been reported in the press as it was not a cut for SEN pupils.

It was queried what impact this would have on the school and children supported by this post. Officers explained that the post did not support a specific pupil and it was likely that the school would keep the post. Members queried why the post was funded by the Education Service and not the school itself and there should be fairness across the board for all schools. Officers explained that it had been a pre-existing arrangement that the Service had been happy to continue, however, savings had to be made.

ELL 713 – ERW – it was explained that this saving would be achieved by reducing the core contribution to ERW and it was a modest reduction. Officers highlighted that ERW should be expected to make savings as well as Local Authorities.

Members queried if there was duplication in the roles of ERW and Estyn. Officers highlighted that they had very different roles, however, they both looked at how schools could improve. Estyn inspected and took a snapshot of how a school was performing at a particular time and made recommendations as part of their inspection report. ERW had Challenge Advisers that were involved with schools continually to assist them with the long term improvement journey.

Members highlighted that Challenge Advisers were employed directly by Local Authorities and queried why money was given to an organisation for the Council to use their own staff. The structure and

core costs of ERW were explained. It was noted that Challenge Advisers were utilised across the region and they had different strengths and responsibilities.

Other budget proposals were also raised by Members. It was asked if there would be any changes to Home to School Transport. Officers explained that there continued to be rationalisation of routes in regards to the cohort of pupils and the required stops. There were no proposals to change the current home to school transport entitlements. It was clarified that this also included the current arrangements for Cwmtawe Secondary School.

Members asked for clarity if the increase price of school meals was income generation or the reduction of subsidy. It was confirmed that it was income generation and the meals were going up by 10p.

Members suggested some potential income generation ideas. It was noted that all school websites were hosted by Neath Port Talbot Council servers and it was suggested that advertising space could be sold on these sites. It was noted that there would be governance issues that would have to be investigated to do this. Officers would consider this proposal further.

It was noted that in the draft savings for consultation there had been an increase in Education Support Services and it was asked if this was actually an increase or an amalgamation of different budget lines. Officers would find out this information and circulate it to the Committee.

The Committee requested that future meetings of Children, Young People and Education Scrutiny Committee to be held in the Chamber. Officers took this on board and highlighted that where possible it would be considered for this Civic Year and feedback to Democratic Services for the development of the new cycle in May.

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

CHAIRPERSON