

POLICY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

(Council Chamber - Port Talbot Civic Centre)

Members Present:

13 June, 2017

Chairman: Councillor A.N.Woolcock

Vice Chairman: Councillor S.Rahaman

Councillors: S.E.Freeguard, M.Harvey, S.K.Hunt,
H.N.James, L.Jones, A.Llewelyn, S.Miller,
J.D.Morgan, S.M.Penry and A.L.Thomas

Officers In Attendance S.Phillips, G.Nutt, A.Evans, N. Jarman, D.Rees,
Mrs.K.Jones and A.Manchipp

Cabinet Invitees: Councillors R.G.Jones, A.J.Taylor, D.Jones,
R.G.Jones, C.Clement-Williams, D.W.Davies,
E.V.Latham, P.A.Rees, P.D.Richards,
A.J.Taylor and A.Wingrave

1. PRE SCRUTINY

The Committee scrutinised the following matters:

Cabinet Board Proposals

(a) Revenue Outturn and Reserves Position Statement 2016/17

The Committee received a detailed presentation of the report of the Director of Finance and Corporate Services on the Revenue Outturn and Reserves Position Statement for 2016/17. Members then raised the following:-

- What was the Corporate Equalisation Reserve and were advised that this consisted of underspends from within Corporate Services which were then used to cover any future unforeseen overspends. There were also equalisation reserves in each of the other Directorates;

- Although Homecare now showed an under spend, there were concerns at the cost of external residential placements in childcare and also in learning disabilities – would these eventually achieve the anticipated savings? The Director of Social Services, Health and Housing advised Members that there was always volatility around budgets and that overall there would be an under spend. Direct Payments would, it was anticipated, help keep service users in their own home, if this was the best option for them, thus reducing the costs of residential care. There was however scope to deliver services within adult services, differently and achieve savings. In relation to external placements in childcare, these were very expensive with the last two placements being in the region of £250k and £280k. The number of Looked After Children had reduced by a significant amount, however this decrease could not continue indefinitely as children would always need to be looked after by the Authority. The Head of Financial Services advised Members that monthly budget monitoring was undertaken by Directorates to monitor closely any under/over spends.
- Members were pleased to note the £179k savings realised in Ysgol Maes Yr Coed.
- Members raised the overspend on parking and asked what was being done to address this. The Director of Environment advised that the overspend was due in part to increased utility costs in relation to the Neath Multi Storey Car Park, reduced charges in both Neath and Port Talbot Town Centres and also pilot projects such as free parking for the first hour in Pontardawe Town Centre. During the forthcoming budget round there would be greater emphasis on income generation in all areas of the Authority. The Director would therefore be commissioning some analysis on the impact of the reduced car parking charges on shoppers within the 3 town centres and whether this supports the local economies. In addition it was noted that the Auditor General had issued a statement advising that local authorities were not maximising income in relation to parking charges. Members asked which Scrutiny Committee would consider the report on parking charges and were advised that this would either be the Policy and Resources/Cabinet Scrutiny Committee or the Streetscene and Engineering Scrutiny Committee.
- Members raised the specific reserves held by schools and noted that some schools reserves were above the recommended 5% of their annual budget, whilst some were

below. The Director of Education, Leisure and Lifelong Learning would be monitoring the position.

- Members acknowledged the need for the Authority to work 'smarter' and to achieve savings, but also acknowledged the need to ensure that the services provided were safe and fit for purpose.
- Some Members asked whether reserves could be used to support other services, and were advised that reserves could only be used once and that this would not address the issue of reducing budgets, year on year. The Chief Executive advised that there were no plans to draw on Reserves to support Social Care and that the way forward was to increase the pace of change. Members were advised that the CSSiW had issued a positive Annual Performance Review Letter in relation to this Authority, which would be reported to the relevant Cabinet Board shortly.

Following scrutiny, the report was noted.

(b)Capital Programme Outturn 2016/17

Members received a presentation on the report of the Head of Financial Services on the Capital Programme Outturn for 2016/17.

Members then raised the following points:

- The amount of the Contingency Fund was discussed wherein it was noted that this amount was available in case of any unforeseen circumstances.
- The Capital Maintenance Programme for schools was discussed, in particular the £105m backlog. The construction of the new schools, through the 21st Century Schools, had negated some of the backlog, however work was only being carried out on the most urgent of jobs.
- Members were pleased with the work undertaken in replacing the streetlights and asked what had caused the budget variation. The Director advised Committee that this was due to more streetlights being replaced in 2016/17 than at first anticipated. As a result there would be an underspend in 2017/18.
- Members asked whether the £3m provided for Disabled Facilities Grants helped service users to remain in their homes and were advised by the Director that the provision of such

things as handrails etc made this possible. The Chief Executive advised Committee that an analysis of the use of the aids provided was needed in order to maximise the impact of the grants.

Following scrutiny, the report was noted.

CHAIRMAN