

CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND EDUCATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Members Present:

17th October 2014

Chairman: Councillor A.R.Lockyer

Vice Chairman: Councillor Mrs.D.Jones

Councillors: A.Carter, Mrs.J.Dudley, M.Ellis, R.G.Jones and J.D.Morgan

**Co-opted Voting
Members:**

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

Officers InAttendance A.Evans, A.Jarrett, J.Hodges and Mrs.K.Jones,
J.Hodges and Miss.C.Gadd

Cabinet Invitees: Councillors P.A.Rees

1. **TO RECEIVE ANY DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST FROM MEMBERS.**

It was noted that the following Members of the Committee had declarations of interest in regard to the budget item and therefore did not attend the meeting:

Councillor Mrs.K.Pearson
Mr.R.De Benedictis

The following Member made declarations of interest at the commencement of the meeting:

Mr.A.Hughes - Joint Report of The Director of Education, Leisure and Lifelong Learning, Director of Social Services, Health and Housing, Head of Planning and Performance, Head of Support Services and Commissioning Development, Leisure and Contracts

Manager and Head of Children and Young People Services, as his daughter was deputy manager of the joint music service.

As a result of the above declaration of interest the Chairman agreed to organise discussion about the Joint Report to allow Mr.A.Hughes to take part in the discussion on the other Education, Leisure and Lifelong Learning Budget Proposals but to withdraw from the meeting during discussions regarding the Music Service and overall cumulative impact of the budget.

2. **EDUCATION AND LIFELONG LEARNING BUDGET STRATEGY PROPOSALS 2015/16 (EXCLUDING MUSIC SERVICE AND CUMULATIVE IMPACT)**

Members received the budget strategy proposals 2015/16 for Education, Leisure and Lifelong Learning. Due to Declarations of Interest it was clarified that the music service and cumulative budget discussions would be restricted to the next item on the agenda when the relevant Co-opted Member had withdrawn from the meeting.

The Director of Education, Leisure and Lifelong Learning outlined the overall budget position and the aim of the proposals for Education was to protect the most vulnerable learners. It was highlighted that the Council had an obligation to provide statutory services to appropriate levels. However, some services do not have specific criteria on what is required, for example the Youth Service is required to deliver an adequate service. Services that were supported by external grant funding would also not be touched by the Council as savings were focused upon the Council's own revenue base budget. It was highlighted that there were a range of proposals, which included transferring some costs to school budgets, reductions in Youth Service provisions and withdrawal of play schemes. It was noted that overall schools were carrying a £3 million reserve and they had to be challenged on how to best utilise this money. The Committee requested that any consultation and Equality Impact Assessment information relevant to the proposals was provided to them at the appropriate time.

Members asked if the proposed closure of five schools were part of the budget strategy proposals. It was clarified that they were part of the Strategic School Improvement Programme and therefore were not part of the budget strategy proposals.

ELLL1 - delegated schools funding budget proposal. Members asked if the cuts were in line with Welsh Governments policy of protecting schools. It was queried how the delegated schools budget could fall when there was a

1% protection. It was highlighted that it was a complicated area to explain as the 1% protection applies to the Welsh Government term and not just to 2015/16. Wales is receiving a 0.4% cut in regards to schools and when the 1% protection is applied this equates to a 0.6% uplift. The Director of Education, Leisure and Lifelong Learning would circulate a further written explanation to clarify this area for Members. Assurance was given to the Committee that the 1% protection Welsh Government policy commitment was being met.

It was noted that Welsh Government were increasing the Pupil Deprivation Grant. It was highlighted that there was a 30% negative gap in performance of pupils in receipt of free school meal and those that were not. This gap is unacceptable and schools need to be challenged on improving service. It was recognised that this would not have much of an impact on some schools that had very few pupils eligible for the grant.

Members queried if there was a rationale behind the schedule which listed items that had been considered for included in the proposals but, following appraisal, had not been put forward. It was clarified that a lot of proposals had been considered in detail and some had been rejected as they were not appropriate or because they would be more detrimental than others. It was noted that there was a rationale behind each proposal and the consultation would assist with examining them in more detail. There had been a partnership budget event for the first time this year and it was felt that it had been very positive. A lot of the suggestions by partners mirrored the proposals that had been put forward. It was noted that if some of the proposals cannot be delivered then alternatives would have to be considered and the officers were open to new ideas.

ELLL4 – withdraw community arts activities budget proposal. Members asked if an agreement over alternative funding been discussed with schools and if it would further impact on school budgets. It was noted that the proposal had been discussed with schools but had not yet agreed and it would impact on school budgets.

ELLL5 – core funding to the Youth Service to be reduced. Members queried what proportion of the Youth Service budget this represented. It was confirmed that it was 10% of the overall budget. Members highlighted that previously when a report on the Youth Service had been presented to the Committee in January 2013, it had been rejected as it was felt the content was flawed and there were issues with how provision was allocated across the County Borough. Members expressed concern if any of the budget proposals had been based on the information contained within this report as a revised version had not been brought back to the Committee. Officers informed Members that following the comments regarding the report the

intention was for a working group to be set up to look at the issues identified, however, due to Service pressures this had not happened. Members asked for assurances that the report that was rejected had not inputted into the budget proposal. Officers confirmed that the budget proposals were not based on the information contained within this report as the Service was now in a different place and it was no longer relevant.

Members requested more detail of the cuts, such as which clubs it would impact on and the rationale behind it. For example, whether it was due to low numbers and if there was other provision in the areas. Officers explained that the proposals were at the initial stage and it was not yet known exactly which clubs would be affected, as this was part of the consultation. It was highlighted that Equality Impact Assessment screening would be undertaken for all proposals and then a full Equality Impact Assessment where required. A project initiation document was being prepared to ensure that consultation results and Equality Impact Assessments fed into the final recommendations. The Committee was informed that around 50 consultation meetings were being arranged in different communities, demonstrating the commitment of services to public engagement. Members emphasised that it was crucial that consultation had to be meaningful. Members also asked if it tied into any Communities First funding and they were informed that Communities First funding would be maximised to produce the best outcomes for an area. It was noted that a Children's Right Unit had been opened in Neath Town Centre, offering a youth club provision, which is an example of other agencies that were delivering youth provision.

Members requested a report on Youth Service provision to be brought to a future meeting of the Committee, after the final budget recommendations had been approved.

ELLL6 – Welsh Translation Service to recover 100% of costs through increased charges to service users. Members asked if the Service was used by other external organisations. Officers explained that it was, but the majority of the work was internal and shared between Swansea and Neath Port Talbot Councils. However, the Service was looking at increasing external work and the possible creation of a social enterprise to make it more commercially viable. It was highlighted that the current charge was well below the industry standard and translation services was a growing industry in Wales. A fine balance had to be struck between attracting external business and the capacity to fulfil internal requirements. The Service may take time to realise the savings attributed to it and a two year target had been allocated as they did not want to price themselves out of the market. Members queried if there would be any job losses and it was noted that the service was hoping to mitigate against this.

ELLL14 – Reduce core budget at Margam Park. Members of the Committee acknowledged that this budget proposal would be scrutinised by Economic and Community Regeneration Scrutiny Committee and requested that their question was referred to this Committee for consideration. Members identified that in Forward Financial Plan 2014/15 a target of £50k reduction had been allocated against Margam Park for 2015/16 financial year, Members queried if the savings in these proposals were in addition to or included this existing saving target.

ELLL15 – Reduce school based counselling and restructure current service. Members expressed concern about such services being reduced and the impact on behaviour in schools. Officers informed Members that counselling services were well received in schools and they were part of a continuum of support offered through schools. It is the responsibilities of schools to provide support to pupils, which was undertaken through a variety of methods and this support would continue.

ELLL16 – Summer playscheme provision to be withdrawn. Some of the Committee were disappointed to see this provision being withdrawn. Other Members felt that there had not been many outcomes from playschemes, which had been raised by the Committee previously. However, others felt that there were a lot of hidden outcomes, such as providing work experience to young people. Officers agreed that it was disappointing and it was a visible and valued service but savings had to be made and it was emphasised that this will not mean that all play provision would stop and the proposal was specifically regarding playschemes.

It was queried if this was a complete cessation of all summer playschemes and if there was alternative provision available in some areas. It was also asked if some of the funding of playschemes was through grants. It was noted that a small element of playschemes were grant funded but the majority was through core funding. It was highlighted that the Play Team would be engaging with organisations, such as Communities First and community groups, to see what they could provide. There is also a stock of play equipment available for organisations to utilise. Members identified that the planning, safeguarding and health and safety arrangements might put some organisations off undertaking them. It was noted that there were experienced staff in the Play Team who would be able to assist organisations in arranging them. Members suggested that it would be a good idea to advertise the availability of resources to community groups.

Members asked what impact this would have on staff and it was noted that most of the staff for the playschemes were casual workers and there would not be a big impact.

ELLL21 – Renegotiate contribution to the Field Studies Council. Members asked if this proposal would result in extra costs to schools and parents. It was clarified that it would be an extra cost to parents, however, low income families would be subsidised by the Local Authority. Members expressed concern that those families who did not have much spare money and would not be subsidised would be affected the most. It was highlighted that the cost of the service would be subject to the negotiations with the Field Studies Council and would be more of a reflection of the true costs. Members suggested if the full costs would be implemented in one go or if there could be a phased introduction. Officers would consider this option.

ELLL22 – Full cost recovery on cleaning services to schools. Members asked if the health and safety risks had been assessed and whether standards would be checked. It was noted that the set standards would apply in regards to safeguarding and health and safety. It was highlighted that most schools should continue with the in house provision and not outsource to external organisations.

ELLL25 – Review financial support for LLAN Co-ordinator/Governor Training. Members expressed concern that this would be a further impact on school budgets and would have an effect on the training governors would receive, especially with the extra duties for governors being brought in. It was highlighted that it would be a different way of providing a service and the relevant training would still be available and undertaken.

ELLL28 – Early Retirement and Voluntary Redundancy (ERVR) trawl. Members expressed concern across the board about the expertise that would be lost through the ERVR trawl. However, the stance to prevent compulsory redundancy where possible was supported by all Members. It was noted that the trawl had received an extensive response so far and the next steps were to assess affordability and impact on services.

ELLL29 – Reduced base budget for school improvement service. More clarity on this service was requested. It was noted that it was a regional service and the budget partly pays for undertaking the autumn core visits with schools and similar improvement activities.

Following scrutiny it was agreed that the budget proposals be noted.

3. **EDUCATION AND LIFELONG LEARNING BUDGET STRATEGY PROPOSALS 2015/16 FOR MUSIC SERVICE AND CUMULATIVE IMPACT**

(At this point Mr.A.Hughes reaffirmed his interest and withdrew for the remainder of the meeting).

ELLL26 – Reduce music tuition base budget. This is a joint service with Swansea and Members queried what Swansea’s position was and whether they would also be reducing funding. Officers informed them they did not need to negotiate with Swansea as the funding was paid separately from each Council, however, the overall impact would need to be considered. Swansea’s position was not clear and no definite proposals had been put forward from them. It was highlighted that there was a mixed picture across Wales on funding music services and some Councils had withdrawn funding completely. Members expressed concern on the wider impact of reducing such services on the community.

Members highlighted the cumulative impact of the budget proposals on schools budgets. Overall, it would be an additional cost of £140k to schools. It was noted that some schools were in a better position than others to deal with the additional costs and the impact would be higher than on smaller schools. However, it was emphasised that a formula would be applied to all schools that would take into account all contributing aspects including school size. This would offer some protection to smaller schools. Officers highlighted that a lot of the services that were being proposed to be moved to school budgets should be part of school budgets and not paid for by the Local Authority. However, there was no illusion that there would be a considerable impact.

Following scrutiny it was agreed that the budget proposals be noted.

4. **CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SERVICES BUDGET STRATEGY PROPOSALS 2015/16**

The Head of Children and Young People’s Services provided the Committee with information regarding the budget strategy proposal for 2015/16 for the Service. SSHH27 – Reduce placements budget to reflect fewer Looked After Children (LAC) per annum from 2015. The aim is a reduction of 26 LAC per annum.

Members were informed that operational costs had already been reduced to pay back the considerable investment that had been put into Children and Young People’s Services but they recognised that they cannot remain in the

privileged position of being protected from cuts. There are four main areas of expenditure in the Service and they are staff costs, operational, Looked After Children and Leaving Care. Where cuts could be made were limited, for example, significant resources had been put into stabilising the workforce and it would be detrimental to make reductions in this area. It was highlighted that the Service had seemed to have stopped the continued increase in the number of children being taken into care. The concentrated effort would now be to safely continue to reduce the number of LAC. Members asked for reassurance that this proposal would not put any children at risk. Officers confirmed that it would not and it was a volatile budget and a reduction by 26 was a guide. Members asked if there was any risk to this target not being met. It was noted that based on last year's figures it should be achievable. Savings would also be made through negotiations with external providers that were significantly more expensive. It was highlighted that the aim would be to continue to reduce the number of LAC during 2016/17 and 2017/18.

SSHH29 – Remodel the administration of the Complaints Service. Members requested further information on this budget proposal and how they fitted in with the recent new complaints policy that had been put in place. It was noted that the proposal would be considered by Social Services, Health and Housing Scrutiny Committee. The Head of Business Strategy and Public Protection had provided more detailed information on the proposals that was circulated to Members of the Committee. If Members had any further queries on this proposal to inform the Scrutiny Officer so they could be sent to the relevant officers.

Following scrutiny it was agreed that the budget proposal be noted.

CHAIRMAN