

## EDUCATION SKILLS AND CULTURE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

(Council Chamber - Port Talbot Civic Centre)

**Members Present:**

**30 November 2018**

**Chairperson:** Councillor A.L.Thomas

**Vice Chairperson:** Councillor M.Crowley

**Councillors:** S. ap Dafydd, M.Ellis, S.Harris, H.N.James, J.Jones, S.Miller, R.Mizen, J.D.Morgan, S.Renkes and D.Whitelock

**Co-opted Voting Members:** M.Caddick

**Officers In Attendance** A.Evans, C.Millis, A.Thomas, P.Walker and C.davies

**Cabinet Invitees:** Councillors P.A.Rees and C.Clement-Williams

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1. **CONSULTATION ON EDUCATION, LEISURE AND LIFELONG LEARNING BUDGET AND DRAFT SAVINGS 2019/20**

Members received information around the current Education, Leisure and Lifelong Learning draft budget consultation exercise as contained within the circulated report.

The Director of Education, Leisure and Lifelong Learning, the Head of Transformation and the Head of Participation presented the report explaining to Members that it had been prepared to provide further information in relation to the budget setting process for the directorate, with a view to aiding the scrutiny of the proposals.

The Chair invited Members of the Scrutiny Committee to ask questions or provide comments on the proposals outlined in Appendix 1 of the report.

The Chair explained to the Scrutiny Committee that the proposals starting with the number 7 or 8 are proposals that were agreed in last year's budget proposals. However the Chair went on to ask about the Pontardawe Arts Centre – Reduce Subsidy budget proposal (ELLL707) as there was a saving of £70k for 2020/21. Officers explained that the £70k had not yet been agreed and is for Members to scrutinise. It was noted that the £70k is through income generation, which would be utilised for the potential development of a Cinema.

Members commented on the School Catering Budget Proposal (ELLL715) highlighting that the Committee recognises the reason for this saving as it is due to the changes to job evaluation.

Members went on to scrutinise the Re-negotiation of the current contract to deliver outdoor education at the Discovery Centre, Margam Park budget proposal (ELLL801) and asked whether the 'sinking fund' of £50k was realistic. Officers clarified that the feel study recommended the amount as it is in their best interest to be feasible.

Members highlighted the importance for the Cefn Coed Colliery Museum Site (ELLL810), to be utilised by families over weekends and school holidays to generate income. Members asked if this is currently happening. Officers highlighted that there is potential of providing a service of this nature and informed members that a bid had been submitted for this purpose.

Members of Scrutiny and Cabinet Members raised concern over the appearance of the entrance of the Cefn Coed Colliery Museum site as it often looks closed. Officers explained that they are aware of this concern and are using social media to raise awareness of the venue and highlighted that most of the income that is generated comes from seasonal events.

Members asked about the School meals proposal (ELLL901) and queried whether the 5p increase was to cover other costs. Officers confirmed that it is not to make a profit it is due to the increase in food. Members commented on the proposed increase and shared their concerns of this having an effect on the parents or guardians. Officers agreed to monitor the impacts on this.

Members went on to scrutinise the Budget proposal on the Music Service (ELLL902). Officers informed Member's that there is funding of £2million due from Welsh Government. It was noted that if the funding was not to be received then there would be pressure on the

service. Officers explained that there may be an announcement next week that will provide a better understanding of the position.

Members then asked if the Council was to receive the funding would there still be an increase in charges for the service. Officers clarified that they would try and keep the increase as low as possible as it is important that the service be affordable.

Members asked how this budget proposal would work in real terms. Officers explained that it is out for consultation, the final settlement would be announced the 19<sup>th</sup> December, 2018, which could potentially mean a better settlement. The final decision would then take place in February. The budget proposal is currently an assumption on what has been identified with the provisional settlement.

Members asked whether the £80k saving in 2019/20 and £81k in 2020/2021 is worst case scenario. Officers explained that depending on what income comes in will mitigate this saving.

Members commended the work of the Music Service and felt that this budget proposal be deferred following the funding being received from Welsh Government.

Members raised concerns on the Cleaning Service Budget Proposal (ELLL903). They were concerned that schools may look for alternative arrangements at a cheaper cost, meaning that services could use products that the council would not approve of and may not be able to cover for urgent appointments. Officers highlighted that if Schools were to have an external service, they would still have to meet the Authority's needs and standards. Members asked officers to consider the joining of services between directorates.

Members asked about the Croeserw Community Centre Budget Proposal (ELLL904) and queried whether there had been any interested parties who would wish to take on the operation of the centre. Officers confirmed that there had been no interest as of yet, as they are still during the consultation period.

Members asked officers to ensure that the Council would be charging the appropriate fees in relation to the Welsh Translation Budget Proposal (ELLL905)

Members queried about the Education Learning Resource Service (ELLL906) and asked whether the service itself could be more commercialised. Officers explained that this budget proposal is all about charging the right items as Schools have a Service Level Agreement In place. Other places pay a much more commercial rate.

Members asked whether the fees and charges have been reviewed. Officers explained that all fees and charges are reviewed annually.

Members raised concerns about the Special Education Service - Out of County placement savings (ELLL907). Members asked if it was an opportunity to develop further specialist establishments within schools and offer those additional places to other areas which would generate an income for the authority. Officers explained that there is still a huge demand within the authority for those spaces and therefore there are unavailable spaces for out of county.

Members asked about the School uniform grant (ELLL908) and queried whether it was 100% funded by Welsh Government. Officers confirmed that it was 100% funded by Welsh Government.

Members were concerned at the over spend within the SEN post 16 transport service (ELLL909). Officers explained that the service had always been under pressure as the children are at a vulnerable age.

The Chair welcomed Cllr.S.Knoyle to the meeting has he had asked prior to the meeting to speak in relation to the Library Service (ELLL912). Members asked what the reasoning was in relation to closing the Library's detailed in the circulated report. Officers explained that the leases of the mobile libraries are coming to an end. The number of book lending are decreasing which is a main part of the function. Officers informed Members that no decision has been made it is only out for consultation.

Members asked whether the review of all libraries would happen prior to the 19<sup>th</sup> December 2018. Officers explained that the review would be post January after the Consultation period.

Members asked how the figure could be determined of 14% saving over 3 years without having concluded the review. Officers explained that this is subject to the consultation. It was highlighted that they would want libraries to continue and be hubs for the communities, however the usage of libraries are limited.

It was noted that it was important to have the comments from the public detailed within the consultation to be considered and then a firmer decision could be brought back.

Members asked whether the amount of cuts would influence the review or the review influence the cuts. Officers explained that they are entwined. It was noted that there has been cuts made previously in this service, however the authority needs to look at how the service can be modernised to fit public's needs.

Members highlighted their concerns for this service and felt that officers needed to reconsider this saving as it would affect the Community. Officers reassured members that they would look at the service with a broader view of it.

Members asked whether officers could consider utilising the social benefit calculator for the libraries.

Members asked about the Youth Service 5% reduction Budget Proposal (ELLL913) and queried what would a cut of 4% mean to the service. Officers reassured members that this wouldn't affect the young people specifically.

Members went on to scrutinise the Schools delegated budget (ELLL 915) and asked what this saving would mean for the schools. Officers explained that this would affect each school separately, and it could mean a possibility of staffing cuts. It was noted that if there were to also be savings within the Music Service and Education Learning Service it would mean a reduction in services for children as the service are connected.

Following scrutiny it was agreed that the report be noted, subject to Officers reconsidering the following three main areas, where the Scrutiny Committee felt they should be prioritised from the budget proposals in the event of a higher final settlement than expected:-

- Schools delegated Budget.
- Music Service
- Libraries

## **CHAIRPERSON**