



EDUCATION FOR LIFE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, YSTRAD MYNACH ON MONDAY, 16TH DECEMBER 2013 AT 5.00 P.M.

PRESENT:

Councillor W. David - Chairman
Councillor D.W.R. Preece - Deputy Chairman

Councillors:

P. Bevan, W. David, H.R. Davies, C. Durham, C. Gordon, D. Havard, M.P. James,
G. Johnston, D.W.R. Preece, J. Pritchard, D. Rees, J.E Roberts, R. Saralis,

Also Present:

Cabinet Member for Education and Leisure: Mrs R. Passmore.

Together with:

S. Aspinall (Acting Deputy Chief Executive), K. Cole (Manager, Learning, Education and Inclusion), T. Maher (Assistant Director, Planning and Strategy), G. Evans (Senior Manager Library Services), T. Cunnick (Manager Community, Youth Service and Adult), Gareth Hardacre (Head of People Management & Development) J. Jones (Democratic Services Manager), C. Evans (Committee Services Officer).

Co-opted Members: Mr. M. Western (Cardiff ROC Archdiocesan), Mr. A. Farina-Childs (Parent Governor).

APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors D. M. Gray and Mrs G.D. Oliver, together with Mrs. A. Goss (Parent Governor) and Mrs. P.J. Ireland (NUT).

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Martyn James' queried a requirement to declare an interest, as his wife is a teacher. Mr Jones clarified that as schools budgets would not be discussed, a declaration would not be required.

There were no declarations of interest received at the start or during the course of the meeting.

SCRUTINY REPORTS

Consideration was given to the following reports.

2. PROVISIONAL LOCAL GOVERNMENT SETTLEMENT 2014/15 - SAVINGS PROPOSALS

S. Aspinall, Acting Deputy Chief Executive introduced the report and accompanying presentation, which detailed the proposed savings and efficiencies for those areas subject to review by the Education for Life Scrutiny Committee. The report provided an overview of the savings requirement for the Council for the period 2014/15 to 2016/17. The savings relate specifically to a number of Authority Wide issues and Directorate savings for 2014/15.

T. Maher, Assistant Director Planning & Strategy, presented the report. Members were asked to note that the Criteria of the Directorate is to raise standards and ensure the needs of the most vulnerable are met, to protect 'Public facing' services', protect jobs and to deliver value for money services. T Maher presented Members with proposed savings that could be made through the realignment of Budget. The savings would be achieved mainly through matching future budgets to with required future spending needs. The budgets identified were the Teacher Performance Management Budget, Home to School Transport, Disclosure Barring Service, Out of County provision and Community Education. Members were informed that the savings were deliverable, would have a low impact to service provision and would provide £540,000 towards the required savings for 2014/15.

Members queried the impact on School Support, with the reduction in Performance Management budget. Officers clarified that there had been an under-spend in the budget for a number of years; hence it was being offered as a low impact saving for 2014/15.

A member requested further information on the impact anticipated for the reduction in the Home to School transport budget. Officers explained that colleagues in the Environment Directorate had recently retendered a number of contracts and had achieved savings due to increased economies of scale and greater market competition. The impact of future increases in fuel prices had been built into the new contracts.

Clarification was sought on the proposal to make savings through the reduction of budget for DBS checks. Officers explained that the savings resulted from a reduction in staff turnover, which was expected to remain constant for 2014/15. Members were assured that staff will not be required to pay for the checks themselves, the budget will not impact on services and it does allow for some additional movement.

Members discussed the level of impact the Out of County Provision budget reduction would have on the services. Officers explained that the pupils with the most complex needs might need support out of the Borough. This support was very expensive, however, with better pupil tracking there has been a significant reduction in the requirement to seek Out of County Placements. Members were assured that sufficient budget provision remained for any Out of County Placements needed.

Clarification was sought on the savings proposal for the Youth Club in Oakdale. Officers confirmed that this was allocated for rental costs for the Youth Club in Oakdale but this service had been taken over by a Voluntary Group. Members were informed that the Voluntary Sector has access to additional funding, not available to local authorities and that the provision in Oakdale would continue.

T. Maher and K. Cole presented Members with the proposed savings to the Directorate through Vacancy Management/Service Reviews. Members were presented with a list of posts that have been vacant for a time, the systems and collaborative efforts that have been implemented which has lead to the posts no longer being required.

Members highlighted that the information contained in the presentation was different to tables included in the officer's report. Officers acknowledged these comments and explained that the figures had been expressed differently in the presentation but the totals remained the same. Officers also underlined that all savings proposals are currently work in progress and could be subject to change.

Concerns were raised about posts not being filled and clarification was sought as to the impact on pupils and service delivery. Members were informed that there has been little impact to services due to a review of systems, the positive impact of the EAS and the implementation of a more sophisticated tracking system which has assisted to reduce service duplication and bridge gaps in support. Head teachers had provided positive feedback as a result of this approach.

Members raised concerns about the proposed decrease to the budget allocated for Special Educational Needs and queried the impact on services and capability of Teaching Assistants to provide appropriate levels of support. Officers clarified that the budget has not historically been spent and Teaching Assistants were proving to provide improved outcomes. Members were informed that feedback from Head Teachers suggested that they are happy with this approach and confident in the level of support provided by staff.

T. Maher and G. Evans presented Members with a detailed overview of the proposed savings for the Library Service through service reduction. The proposed savings amounted to £57,000 and would be achieved through reductions in the Libraries Subscriptions Budget and Libraries Book Fund.

Members discussed their concerns at the proposed budget cuts and suggested an increase in late return fees. Members noted that the Council is part of a scheme, which allows books to be shared across other Local Authorities, which should help minimise the impact on services. Officers highlighted that late fees were reviewed in the past and were found to offer little additional revenue but may result in deterring Library users.

Officers summarised the report and presentation and reiterated that the proposed savings for 2014/15 have a low impact to services. Members were asked to note that in the New Year, a report would be provided for their consideration, which would outline future, more difficult savings proposals for 2015/16 and 2016/17.

The meeting closed at 18:30 p.m.

Approved as a correct record, and subject to any amendments or corrections agreed and recorded in the minutes of the meeting held on 14th January 2014, they were signed by the Chairman.

CHAIRMAN