



SPECIAL EDUCATION FOR LIFE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, YSTRAD MYNACH ON THURSDAY, 19TH JUNE 2014 AT 5.30 P.M.

PRESENT:

Councillor W. David-Chair
Councillor J. Pritchard -Vice Chair

Councillors:

P.J. Bevan, Mrs. A. Blackman, H.R. Davies, D.W.R. Preece, C. Gordon, D.M. Gray.
D. Havard, M.P. James, G. Johnston, Mrs G.D. Oliver, J.E. Roberts and R. Saralis.

Together with:

S. Aspinall (Acting Deputy Chief Executive), K. Cole (Manager, Learning, Education and Inclusion), G. Evans (Senior Manager Library Service), T. Maher (Assistant Director Planning and Strategy), H. Morgan (Integrated Transport Unit) and E. Sullivan (Democratic Services Officer).

Co-opted Members: Mr A. Farina-Childs (Parent Governor), Mrs A. Goss (Parent Governor) and Mrs P. Ireland (NUT).

APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Mrs M.E. Sargent and Cabinet Member for Education, Life Long Learning and Inclusion Councillor R. Passmore and Mr M. Western (Cardiff ROC Archdiocesan).

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Clarification was sought as to whether Members of the Committee who were also School Governors should declare an interest in agenda items 3(2) and 3(4) as they had the potential to impact on all schools within the borough. Members were advised that as the information provided for consideration did not require a decision they were able to remain in the meeting room and take an active part in the debate but should declare their interest.

Declarations of Interest were received as follows: Councillors P.J. Bevan, W. David, H.R. Davies, C. Gordon, D.M. Gray, D. Havard, M.P. James, G. Johnston, D.W.R. Preece, J. Pritchard, J.E. Roberts and R. Saralis - Agenda Item No. 3(2) and 3(4), details are minuted with the respective Item.

REPORTS OF OFFICERS

Consideration was given to the following reports.

2. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN CONTEXT (VERBAL UPDATE)

The Acting Deputy Chief Executive provided a verbal introduction on the Medium Term Financial Plan in order to provide the context for discussion going forward.

Members were advised that today's meeting was the first stage in the process and confirmed that the information for consideration did not require a decision at this point. Once the nature of the Local Government Settlement was known and the Authority had a clear steer on its position and the savings to be made, further detailed reports would be brought forward for Members to scrutinise. The Acting Deputy Chief Executive assured Members that they would be provided with all the relevant information required to make an informed recommendation to Cabinet and Council at the appropriate time.

In conclusion Members were invited to ask as many questions as needed and request as much additional further information as was felt necessary in order to ensure that every avenue and option had been fully explored and assurance given that nothing would be left off the table.

The Chair thanked the Acting Deputy Chief Executive for her update and drew Members attention to the initial list of discretionary service options for consideration over the next three special scrutiny committee meetings.

A Member sought clarification as to whether any restructuring plans were being considered and was advised that a restructuring programme had been planned across a number of services.

3. CAERPHILLY COUNTY BOROUGH EDUCATION MUSIC SERVICE MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN 2015/17 - ITEMS FOR CONSIDERATION

Councillors P.J. Bevan, W. David, H.R. Davies, C. Gordon, D.M. Gray, D. Havard, M.P. James, G. Johnston, D.W.R. Preece, J. Pritchard, J.E. Roberts and R. Saralis declared an interest in that they are also School Governors.

Keri Cole, Manager Learning Education and Inclusion introduced the report which presented five options for consideration with regard to the provision of discretionary music services in schools. The options ranged from retaining all existing management arrangements to removing all discretionary support for music to schools. Members were reminded that the music service was entirely discretionary and referred them to the staffing profile of the service and the potential reconfiguration of the service that could be achieved through natural vacancy management over the next five years.

Changes to teaching practices and the different types of support being requested by schools were outlined and it was confirmed that as part of every option put forward, schools would still be able to continue to purchase Service Level Agreements for customised music support packages.

The Chair thanked the Officer for her report and full discussion ensued.

Clarification was sought as to the long term affect that Option 2, the removal of the whole service, would have. The Officer confirmed that some schools would be in a position to buy in music services however they too were subject to budgetary constraints. Pupils who were financial able to do so could pay for the service however this would leave many pupils in particular those claiming free school meals unable to access music tuition. Without direct

expertise the impact on young musicians would be considerable. Although Officers acknowledged that this was a purely discretionary service, they reminded Members that educational development was not just about academia but providing a board and balanced curriculum within which pupils could flourish.

A Member referred to Option 5 and sought further information as to how staff would be recruited into the service under this option. The Officer confirmed that recruitment would be realigned to take into account the very diverse way in which music is delivered and the different skill sets required for different instruments. Currently the service is made up of both tutors and teachers this option proposes that on the retirement of staff on teacher pay and conditions their replacements would be recruited on tutor conditions providing a wider range of tuition as well as value for money.

Reference was made to Option 4 and clarification sought in relation to SLA charges and whether any negotiation could be entered into with schools in order for them to meet more of the costs. The Officer confirmed that meetings had been held with Head Teachers in this regard, however due to budgetary constraints schools were reducing what they currently buy in and although music was not at the top of their list of priorities it was highly valued and they would be unable to replicate the kind of service provided.

The feasibility of schools getting together for music provision was queried and the Officer advised that tutors already worked in clusters to reduce travel time and provided tutorials over a range of school years and instruments as well as one to one session for the more talented musicians. However logistically it was not always feasible to have a shared specialist tutor.

With regard to Option 5 and reviewing terms and condition of staff, a Member queried if earlier retirement/contract buy out options had been considered. The Acting Deputy Chief Executive confirmed that a report would be presented to the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee on a range of HR options including severance and retirement opportunities.

Clarification was sought in relation to Option 3 with regard to adapting management arrangements. The Officer confirmed that up until October 2013 the music service had shared a Manager with Rhondda Cynon Taff Council. This had been brought in house on an interim basis and managed by the current team in order to ascertain the long term feasibility of in house provision. Members were advised that bringing the service close to hand had worked well with a lot of positive feedback received from schools. It had become apparent that there was no need to replace this Manager. The workforce profile also meant that natural savings could be achieved without an impact on schools.

Further clarification was sought in relation to the retention of the Four Counties Orchestra and where this could be retained should Option 3 go forward. The Officer confirmed that this would be achievable under this option.

Having fully considered the report and the 5 options presented it was moved and seconded that the principle of Option 3 be accepted and by a show of hands this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that the principle of Option 3: to adapt the management arrangements and review provision in line with school's requirements. Annual savings of £100,000 in the first instance, no additional costs for implementation. Management of vacancies will produce further savings over the next few years as provision is further refined be agreed as part of the ongoing consultation on the Medium Term Financial Plan.

4. CAERPHILLY COUNTY BOROUGH LIBRARY SERVICES MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN 2015/17 - ITEMS FOR CONSIDERATION

Tony Maher , Assistant Director Planning and Strategy and Gareth Evans, Senior Manager Library Services introduced the report which presented five options for consideration in relation to Library Services. The options ranged from retaining all existing library services with no reduction to the Borough's 18 facilities or opening arrangements to the Authority's total withdrawal from delivering a Public Library Service.

An overview of the different options was provided and the estimated levels of savings that could be achieved under each confirmed. Members were referred to the table in section 4.5 of the report and were advised that the savings identified for 2014/15, £98,000 in this instance had already been achieved. The efficiencies as reference within the table could achieve an estimated £239K of savings over financial years 2015-16 and 2016-17 and this figure would be in addition to the savings presented under each of the options put forward for consideration.

In terms of Option 1, no material changes to the delivery of the service it was noted that this would only achieved the aforementioned £239K savings.

For Option 2, the no services option, Officers confirmed that this had been incorporated for the sake of completeness and advised that no local authority had discharged its library services. Members were reminded that this was a statutory service with elements at the discretion of the local authority. The risks associated with this option were explained and Members advised of the potential for High Court/Welsh Government intervention and the claw back of certain grant awards.

Option 3, proposed a tapered library service with opening hours and contract employment across the library network reduced. This option would protect provision at all 18 sites with all communities retaining a service and achieve an estimated £417k of savings. Officers confirmed the possible redundancy and redeployment implications associated with this option, as a reduction in contract staff hours would apply to 16 Officers. It was noted that an invest to save commitment of £70,000 would need to be made in order to introduce self service kiosk at 7 smaller libraries where single staffing would be required.

The tapered provision would be linked to the size of population served in each area. Saturday provision would be reduced and lunch time closures implemented to reduce the level of cover required at this time. It was noted that this option would still be in excess of library standards providing 136 hours per 1000 head of population.

Option 4, proposed that smaller facilities be offered to the community to operate and Officers confirmed that six sites had been identified under this option. Aberbargoed, Deri, Llanbradach, Machen, Nelson and Pengam being the most suitable locations for a community managed service. It was noted that Library Services would offer only professional support under this option, no Library service staff would be employed on site. Members were advised that Community Libraries would retain a network of support and full stock access. IT links would be provided for the provision of the Library Management system and 'gifting' of public PC's needed to be considered. This option would be subject to a legal agreement on opening times and there were implications relating to the claw back of grant funding awarded to Pengam and Nelson Library.

Members were asked to note that the savings differential between Option 3 (£417k) and Option 4 (£459k) was £42k.

Finally Members were referred to Option 5 which proposed the closure of libraries serving the smallest population bases. This would impact on 6 sites and affect 14 Library Staff in a mix of full and part time roles. This option would also have implications relating to the claw back of grant funding. It was noted that taking into account the proposed closure of the six sites the Authority would still meet the proximity standard.

Members were asked to note that the saving differential between Option 1 (417k) and Option 5 (£441.5k) was £24k.

In conclusion Officers reminded Members that the options put forward were an illustration of what could be done and their comments, questions and suggestions were welcomed.

The Chair thanked the Officers for their report and full discussion ensued.

A Member sought clarification with regard to Option 3 and the affect on Nelson, New Tredegar and Aberbargoed Libraries and asked if there would be any way to mitigate the impact. Officers confirmed that the options provided were a yard stick on possible options and revisions would be possible, however any changes would result in lesser savings being achieved.

Concerns were expressed that Option 3 had greater staffing implications than Option 4 and further clarification was sought. Officers confirmed that Option 3 would have staffing implications across the board and advice had been taken from HR colleagues in this regard. In order to be as fair as possible should Option 3 progress then a complete blanket recruitment of the new tapered service would be undertaken. The new posts/hours would be ring-fenced and existing staff invited to apply for whatever suited them best.

A Member expressed a preference for Option 3 as this meant the retention of services at all sites however it was noted that some larger libraries would be awarded increased hours whereas others would find themselves disadvantaged with decreased hours. This did not seem to take into account the actual usage of individual libraries. The Member referenced the high turnover at Nelson library which under Option 3 would have greatly reduced operating hours. The Member requested that further information on a no gains option be brought back to this Committee and the impact this would have on achievable savings.

Officers confirmed that there would be no problem accommodating the Members request and advised that the figures presented had been based purely on the library banding methodology. Reference was made to Newbridge Library which would see an increase in hours of operation under Option 3, the Member confirmed that Newbridge was being well served by its current hours and would like to see a more equitable spread in opening hours across the board.

Members requested further information on footfall, book issues and usage at all libraries in order to get a more rounded picture and an analysis of the impact on savings/costs against opening hours broken down into 10 hour blocks.

In terms of amended opening hours Members expressed concern with regard to the impact on families should Saturday openings be lost and requested further information on the cost/savings implications of withdrawing a weekday opening in order to retain a Saturday.

Officers confirmed that they would be happy to look at any permutations of the tapered opening hours option.

A Member referred to Option 4 and whether any other Authority was pursuing this option as it would be preferable to support a local group than loose a library. Officers confirmed that Neath Port Talbot were in the very early stages of establishing Community Managed Libraries and advised that a lot of background work was in place in terms of the legal issues involved. If the Neath Port Talbot model were followed then a link PC would be provided for the issue,

return and renewal of books. New users would need to register via the website and the community would need to provide the library with a broadband link. Professional support would continue to be provided to ensure that customers would not be disadvantaged.

Clarification was sought in relation to the claw back of grant funding and whether any leeway would be possible in this regard. Officers confirmed that there were specific terms and conditions attached to any grant award and should these be breached then the original award amount would be recouped by the awarding organisation. For instance if the library for which the award was made no longer existed, then 100% of the grant would need to be paid back.

In relation to a tapered approach a Member queried if further reductions would be required in subsequent years. Officers advised that at this point in time it would be impossible to speculate on the financial position of the public sector going forward, further more serious cuts may still be required but this was dependent on the Local Government settlement.

Having fully considered the report and the 5 options presented it was moved and seconded that the principle of Option 3 be accepted subject to further information being brought forward for consideration and by a show of hands this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that the principle of Option 3: Opening hours and contracted employment across the Council Library Network be reduced subject to the following additional information: -

1. How the impact on Nelson, New Tredegar and Aberbargoed Libraries could be mitigated under the tapered option and the impact on savings.
2. Footfall data on each Library.
3. Weekly book issues for each Library.
4. The cost implications of withdrawing an opening day in the week to retain a Saturday opening.
5. Further data on the cost implications of a no gain opening hours schedule.
6. Analysis of the impact on savings/costs against opening hours broken down into 10 hour blocks.

5. CAERPHILLY COUNTY BOROUGH EDUCATION TRANSPORT MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN 2015/17 - ITEMS FOR CONSIDERATION

Tony Maher, Assistant Director Planning and Strategy and Huw Morgan, Team Leader Integrated Transport Unit introduced the report which presented eleven areas of discretionary provision in relation to home to school transport.

Members were advised that Caerphilly was currently the most generous Authority in terms of discretionary transport provision in Wales. Members were presented with the provision areas for other Authorities within the consortia so that comparisons could be made. The statutory distance for free home to school transportation was confirmed as 2 miles for Primary School and 3 miles for Secondary School pupils. Officers confirmed that this authority currently provided free transport at 1.5 miles for Primary and 2 miles for Secondary School pupils.

It was noted that under Option ET2 should the walking distances for pupils aged 5 to 16 be realigned to the statutory distance allocation a saving of £400,000 could be achieved in financial year 2016/17 and would impact on 1,100 pupils.

In terms of Option ET1, Post 16 Transport provision it was noted that there was no statutory requirement for this service and its withdrawal would secure efficiencies in the order of £300,000. Members were advised that Post 16 Transport included the use of bus passes as well as contract bus services.

Option ET3 proposed the review of Post 16 Transport arrangements for pupils with additional learning needs. Members were advised that this option had been included in the interest of completeness. It was noted that the transport for 68 pupils with ALN and an additional 31 Trinity Fields students was currently fully funded by the Authority.

The allocation of spare seats on concessionary transport was outlined under Option ET4 and a proposed that consideration be given to implementing a charge for this service. Officers advised that these seats were currently offered to parents free of charge on a first come first served basis and confirmed that most other authorities already had a charging structure in place charge of between £180 and £360 per annum.

Changes to Escort provision on Primary and Secondary School Transport were outlined under option ET5. It was noted to affect 1180 pupils at Primary level and 450 pupils at Secondary level. Members were referred to the current escort provision at Lewis Boys School as a result of number of significant issues with poor pupil behaviour at a cost of £30,000 per annum.

Option ET7 detailed the savings that could be achieved through the withdrawal of discretionary transport to Faith Schools. Officer confirmed that free transport was currently provided to the nearest Faith School and advised Members of the requirements of the Learner Travel (Wales) Measure in relation to denominational preference. It was noted that most Councils in Wales provided transport of Faith Schools on this basis although Neath Port Talbot and Wrexham had recently withdrawn provision and some others were reviewing their policy. The withdrawal of this service would secure an estimate saving of £468,000.

However, Members were asked to be mindful of a possible legal challenge that could be made in this regard by failing to follow through an educational choice, by accepting a child at a primary age and failing to provide that choice through to secondary age.

ET8 presented options for transport to Welsh Medium Schools it was noted that most Councils provided free transport to the appropriate Welsh Medium School and reference was made again to the requirements of the Learner Travel Measure (Wales). The withdrawal of this services would secure estimated savings of £1,316,500 and 1700 pupils would be affected by any change of provision.

Option ET9 detailed the savings that could be achieved through the withdrawal of discretionary transport for pupils who change address in years 10 to 13. This service allowed pupils to complete their GCSE courses at the same school, it was noted that 10 pupils were presently in receipt of this service and no ability to pay had been taken into account in the provision of this service.

Discretionary provision ET10 provided transport for pupils residing in temporary housing such as Refuges, Hostels or Temporary Housing. This service was usually provided by season ticket on public transport, taxi or a seat on an available contract bus. The withdrawal of this service would achieve estimated savings of £29,000.

Finally Officers outlined the options under ET11, the review of free transport on hazardous walking routes identifies as low risk but less than the defined policy distance for free transport.

Members were advised that hazardous routes were classed as negligible/low risk to medium/high risk categories and were assessed by Technical Officers in the Engineering Services Division. The withdrawal of the service for low risk routes would achieve an estimated saving of £98,000.

The Chair thanked the Officers for the report and full discussion ensued.

A Member referred to option ET2 and the review of discretionary statutory distances and the implications for pupils of the Pontllanfraith Ward who would be moving to a new school at Oakdale. Reference was made to discussions with Residents, Parents and Governors in relation to the provision of free transport to the new school, as this had been a major selling point for the new site.

The Member requested further information on the implications for the Pontllanfraith Ward should the statutory distance allowance be adopted, as related to the location of the new school. The number and location of the pupils who would qualify and the number and location of those pupils who would fall outside that distance.

Reference was made to the under-spend secured against last years school transport budget and clarification sought as to where this money had been reallocated and how the under-spend had been achieved.

Officers confirmed that under-spends were held in the equalisation reserve and had been achieved due to the timing of the Easter school holidays which resulted in less days travelled against that financial year. These monies were usually held in reserve to offset any extra days should the timing of the holiday period change. It was noted that periods of inclement weather could also affect the under-spend figure.

Members requested further information on any under-spend on the transport budget and which other budget allocations benefitted from this under-spend and by how much.

Members fully discussed option ET8 and the provision of transport to Welsh Medium Schools and the Acting Deputy Chief Executive referred Members to the requirements of the Learner Travel Measure (Wales) and its terminology as referenced in the report. It was noted that no Welsh Authority had withdrawn transport services to Welsh Medium Schools.

Concerns were expressed on the far reaching nature of the proposed options and the impact that they would have on every constituency. Reference was made to the use of alternative transportation resources, such as travel grants, bus passes and if possible that savings could be achieved through alternative methods rather than the proposals detailed within the report.

The Acting Deputy Chief Executive confirmed that all options with regard to discretionary savings would be presented for Members consideration in the forthcoming months. By providing as much information as possible during the lead in time to the Local Government Settlement, Members would be better prepared to make informed recommendations. Once the Settlement was known more focused reports would be brought forward with targeted areas of savings identified as a result of these preliminary discussions.

Officers confirmed that whatever options were considered extensive consultation process would be required and any service changes introduced in a phased way. Services could not simply be taken away.

Members referred to option ET6 and the escort provision allocation to Lewis Boys School and whether this requirement still applied. Officers confirmed that the service had not been reviewed and agreed to contact the Head Teacher in this regard. Members requested further information on this issue following discussion with the school.

Members referred to option ET11 and the different categories of hazardous routes, further information was requested on what constituted a hazardous route and examples of those routes be provided.

Members requested further information on the cost and savings implications of providing free transport at 1.75 miles - Primary / 2.5 miles - Secondary against the statutory distance of 2miles - Primary/ 3 Miles - Secondary and the number of children affected.

Members requested further information on the impact on parents should free transport to Faith, Post 16 and Welsh Medium Schools be removed.

Having noted the far reaching implications of the home to school transport service it was moved and seconded that consideration of the report be deferred to allow more time to consider the options presented and by a show of hands this was agreed by the majority present.

RESOLVED that consideration of the report be deferred to the next appropriate meeting and that further information be provided on the following: -

1. The implications should the statutory distance allowance be adopted on the Pontllanfraith Ward as related to the location of the new school. Number of pupils and location of the pupils who would qualify and number of pupils and location of pupils who would fall outside that distance.
2. Examples of what constitutes a hazardous route and the different levels of hazardous routes be provided and their locations
3. Officers make enquiries relating to the issues regarding transport/escort at Lewis Boys School and if they are still relevant.
4. Post 16 Transport - the number of ways this can be provided be detailed and a cost break down provided.
5. Figures on any under-spend on the transport budget and which other budget allocations benefitted from this under-spend and by how much.
6. The cost and savings implication of providing free transport at 1.75 miles - Primary / 2.5 miles - Secondary against the statutory distance of 2miles - Primary/ 3 Miles - Secondary and the number of children affected.
7. Impact on parents should free transport to Faith, Post 16 and Welsh Medium Schools be removed.

The meeting closed at 20.08 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 Tuesday, 8th July 2014, they were signed by the Chair.

CHAIRMAN