



SPECIAL EDUCATION FOR LIFE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, YSTRAD MYNACH
ON THURSDAY, 15TH DECEMBER 2016 AT 5.30PM.**

PRESENT:

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

Councillors:

P.J. Bevan, H.R. Davies, M.P. James, Mrs. P. Marsden, D.W.R. Preece, D. Rees, J.E. Roberts, R. Saralis, Mrs M.E. Sargent, J. Simmonds.

Together with:

K. Cole (Chief Education Officer), N. Scammell (Acting Director of Corporate Services and S151 Officer), S. Richards (Principal Finance Officer), S. Ead (Solicitor), A. Dredge (Committee Services Officer).

Also Present:

Co-opted Members: Mr D. Davies (Caerphilly Governors Association), Mr M. Barry and Mr R. Morgan (Parent Governors), Mr. M. Western (Cardiff Archdiocesan Commission for Education Representative).

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors J. Bevan, C. Gordon, G. Johnston, Mrs G.D. Oliver and Mrs P.J. Ireland and Mrs J. Havard (NUT).

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

3. DRAFT BUDGET PROPOSALS FOR 2017/18

The Acting Director of Corporate Services and S151 Officer introduced the report that provided Members with the draft budget proposals for the 2017/18 financial year that had been presented to Cabinet on the 30th November 2016. As part of the consultation process on the draft budget proposals the Scrutiny Committee was asked to consider and comment upon the content of the report prior to a final decision being made in February

2017. Members noted the headline issues in the Welsh Government Provisional 2017/18 Local Government Financial Settlement (that was published on 19th October 2016) and details of the draft budget proposals for 2017/18 were set out. The report detailed Whole Authority Cost Pressures (£2.745m), Inescapable Service Pressures (£6.186m), and the Reduction in Welsh Government Funding (£0.608m). Additionally, the report outlined draft savings proposals for 2017/18 (£8.653m) and a proposed Council Tax Uplift of 1% (£0.886) which will ensure that a balanced budget is deliverable for 2017/18.

The report outlined the pressures placed on service areas, with significant pressure on Social Services for essential payments in relation to the National Living Wage that had an impact on supplier's contract prices to Caerphilly County Borough Council and the ever-increasing demand for services in both Adult and Children's Services. As a result, the report proposed that £3.5m be allocated in the 2017/18 budget to meet ongoing financial pressures within Social Services. It was explained that cost pressures for schools are excluded as these will be funded through a proposed increase of 1.25% that will fund pay and non-pay inflationary increases and will also fund the majority of the cost of the impact of the Apprenticeship Levy in relation to Schools. Members were advised that although the Levy will be introduced by the UK Government from April 2017 and will be applicable in Wales, it is currently unknown how this will operate in Wales and how funding will be made available in Wales.

The Scrutiny Committee were informed that although the provisional 2017/18 financial settlement is much better than originally anticipated, the emerging cost pressures identified have resulted in a net savings requirement of £8.653m. Included in the proposals are £3.037m of savings identified for 2017/18 that do not have a direct impact on service users or the public. A saving of £3.5m has also been proposed through undertaking a review of the Authority's Minimum Revenue Provision Policy, which was recently reported to the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee. A Members' Seminar has been scheduled for 12th January 2017, which will allow Members to be fully briefed on the proposed changes, ahead of the proposals being presented to Cabinet and thereafter Council for consideration.

During the course of the ensuing debate, a Member queried the matter of bowling green rationalisation (agreed by Cabinet in March 2016). Officers confirmed that a consultation was undertaken as part of the process and details of the approved changes were set out. Another Member queried the figure set aside for Welsh Language Standards and was advised that significant financial pressures are being experienced in this area due to the new Welsh Language Standards and the Local Authority must comply with the legislation or the Council could receive significant fines from the Welsh Language Commissioner.

Clarification was sought in relation to the 'nil impact' vacancy management savings detailed in the report, with Members expressing concerns in relation to the impact that staffing reductions and subsequent service pressures could have on individuals. Officers outlined the context of these proposals and confirmed they were not aware of any compulsory redundancies as a result of savings and enquiries would be made following the meeting and the information distributed. A Member requested statistics of stress related sickness levels of staff within schools and was assured that the Council is committed to promoting employee wellbeing and reducing work-related stress as much as possible. These figures would also be provided following the meeting. Officers also explained that appropriate consultation with staff and trade unions will be undertaken prior to any restructuring arrangements being implemented.

Following consideration and discussion and subject to there being no compulsory redundancies, it was moved and seconded that the recommendations in paragraph 10 of the report be supported. Paragraph 10.1. and 10.2. was supported by the majority present with 1 abstention and paragraph 10.1.3. was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that subject to the foregoing, the Education for Life Scrutiny Committee supported:

- (i) subject to there being no compulsory redundancies, the draft 2017/18 budget proposals including the proposed savings totalling £8.653m be endorsed;
- (ii) subject to there being no compulsory redundancies, the proposal to increase Council Tax by 1% for the 2017/18 financial year to ensure that a balanced budget is achieved (Council Tax Band D being set at £1,011.96) be supported;
- (iii) the draft budget proposals be subject to consultation prior to final 2017/18 budget proposals being presented to Cabinet and Council in February 2017.

The meeting closed at 6.30pm.

Approved as a correct record and subject to any amendments or corrections agreed and recorded in the minutes of the meeting held on 27th February 2017. they were signed by the Chair.

CHAIR