



SPECIAL EDUCATION FOR LIFE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, YSTRAD MYNACH
ON MONDAY, 17TH DECEMBER 2018 AT 5.30PM.**

PRESENT:

Councillor D. Havard - Chair
Councillor C. Andrews - Vice-Chair

Councillors:

A. Collis, S. Cook, W. David, A. Farina-Childs, D.T. Hardacre, M.P. James, B. Miles, J.E. Roberts, R. Saralis, J. Simmonds and R. Whiting

P. Marsden (Cabinet Member for Education and Achievement)

Together with:

R. Edmunds (Corporate Director for Education and Corporate Services), K. Cole (Chief Education Officer), S. Richards (Head of Education Planning and Strategy), N. Scammell (Head of Corporate Finance and Section 151 Officer), J. Southcombe (Financial Services Manager), P. O'Neil (Senior Youth Service Manager), E. Sullivan (Senior Committee Services Officer) and K. Houghton (Committee Services Officer).

Also Present:

Co-opted Members: Mr D. Davies (Caerphilly Governors Association), Mr M. Barry and Mr R. Morgan (Parent Governors)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors P.J. Bevan, Mrs G.D. Oliver and Mrs T. Parry and co-opted Members Mr M. Western (Cardiff ROC Archdiocesan Commission for Education Representative) and Mrs P.J. Ireland (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 2019/20

The Head of Corporate Finance and Section 151 Officer introduced the report, which had been presented to Cabinet on the 14th November 2018. The report provided details of the

draft budget proposals for the 2019/20 financial year and to allow for a period of consultation (19th November 2018 to the 11th January 2019) prior to a final approval by Full Council on 21st February 2019. The proposals are based on the Welsh Government (WG) Provisional 2019/20 Local Government Financial Settlement and a higher than forecast council tax rise by 6.95%, which will reduce the savings target from £15.6m to £14.6m, to enable the Authority to set a balanced budget. A Members' Seminar was held on the 15th November 2018 to consider the proposals and a further Seminar is proposed for January 2019 ahead of the final report being presented to Cabinet on the 13th February 2019 and Full Council on the 21st February 2019. The Officer emphasised that the Authority is entering unprecedented times and moving forward there would be difficult decisions to be made.

Members were advised of the whole Authority cost pressures as set out in paragraphs 4.2.3. to 4.2.9. in the report and of the service pressures being faced by the Authority. It was highlighted to Members that Teachers and Fire Service superannuation was a particular cost pressure which could potentially be addressed via funding from the Revenue Support Grant (RSG) despite an overall net cash decrease in the RSG.

Members were advised that there had been some indications from WG that Treasury reserves could be made available to fund liability in 2019/20. This would not be confirmed until early January and would be one off funding. The Chair thanked the Officer for their report and welcomed Member's questions and comments.

A Member raised concerns regarding the additional pressure cuts in schools would place on staff and how the wellbeing of staff was being managed going forward. The Director for Education and Corporate Services acknowledged that there would be additional pressure placed on schools but this was similar to services across the Council. He advised Members that measures were being taken as part of the development of the Education Attainment Strategy which will see an increased focus on staff wellbeing and building resilience within school senior management teams which will be filtered down to staff at all levels. The draft of this Strategy will be presented to the Committee on the 8th January 2019.

Members discussed the overall net cash decrease in the RSG and potential additional funding from Treasury Reserves. The Head of Corporate Finance and Section 151 Officer advised Members that if they were minded, they could recommend that any savings or additional funding could be directed to reducing cuts in school budgets. A Member put forward a recommendation that any savings gained, particularly from teacher superannuation or additional funding received, should be put towards reducing cuts in school budgets. This recommendation was agreed by the majority of Members present.

Having fully considered the report, Members unanimously agreed that details of the draft budget proposals for 2019/20 be noted and it be recommended to Cabinet that any savings gained, particularly from teacher superannuation or additional funding received, should be put towards reducing cuts in school budgets.

RECOMMENDATION to Cabinet that any savings gained, particularly from teacher superannuation or additional funding received, should be put towards reducing cuts in school budgets.

4. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN – SAVINGS PROPOSALS 2019/20

The Director for Education and Corporate Services introduced the report which sought the views of Members regarding the 2019/20 savings proposals for the Education Directorate, prior to final 2019/20 budget proposals being presented to the Cabinet on 13th February 2019 and Full Council on the 21st February 2019. As part of the consultation process on the draft budget proposals, Members were asked to consider and comment upon the content of the report.

Members were also referred to the report appendices which contained equality impact assessments for each of the 2019/20 savings proposals that are expected to impact on the public.

Members referred to the proposed saving detailed in 4.3.4 of the Officer's report, Education Welfare Service and commented that the creation of an administrative post to counter a reduction in Education Welfare Officer (EWO) FTE would result in a reduction in 'frontline' service delivery. Members raised concerns that a change in the service provisions delivered by the Education Welfare Service and the increased expectation that schools would become more self-sufficient with managing attendance and welfare would place additional pressure on schools and increase their workload. The Chief Education Officer explained to Members that it had been found that schools were more effective at managing attendance levels when a whole staff approach was taken as a result the EWO's role in this aspect of delivery was decreasing. The role has not ceased however it has changed with a greater focus on administrative work. Members were assured that this change would not impact on teachers as there is strict legislation in place which dictates what roles teachers can and cannot take on.

With regard to the proposed saving detailed in 4.3.5 of the Officer's report, Music Service, Members questioned the use of agency staff within the Music Service in lieu of employed staff and whether this represented an unknown cost. The Finance Manager (Education Lifelong Learning & Schools) informed Members that the use of agency staff was to fill gaps in the teaching of specific instruments and therefore costs had been appropriately budgeted.

In relation to the savings proposal detailed in 4.3.6 of the Officer's report, for Libraries, Members raised concerns that there were elements of the 'Staffing Model in Libraries' proposal that were yet to be determined, which made it difficult to comment on. The Head of Education Planning and Strategy clarified to Members that a review of staffing numbers would take place with consideration given to promoting self-service and potentially reducing staff hours. It is anticipated that there will be no impact on the services available to the public.

Members sought reassurance regarding library closure and provision was in place to cover staff absences. The Officer confirmed that there would be no changes to Library opening or closing times as a result of this proposal. She also confirmed that there is a supply service which could be used in the event of staff absences.

With regard to the proposed savings detailed in 4.3.8 of the Officer's report, School Improvement Initiatives, Budget Removal, Members commented that the School improvement budget had been used extensively in the past and questioned whether the use of reserves if 'emergency' fund were required was sustainable, adequate and flexible enough to respond to unpredictable circumstance that may arise over the year. The Chief Education Officer reassured Members that there were a number of provisions in place to prevent schools reaching the point where financial support was needed. She explained that schools can need support for a number of reasons not necessarily financial ones and provisions such as peer support and head mentoring opportunities were in place and the Service worked closely with the EAS to identify Schools that need additional support at the early stages. The reserves are there simply for unpredicted emergencies. Taking this approach ensures better protection for statutory services.

In relation to the saving proposal detailed in section 4.3.10 of the Officer's report, Libraries Book Stock, Budget Reduction, Members suggested that a closer look at Library book stocks could generate alternative savings to those proposed by identifying those titles in libraries that are not used and selling these on. Members also suggested as an alternative saving that central reserves for particular book types be formed in nominated libraries which would reduce duplication of rarely used books in libraries across the Authority. The Head of Education Planning and Strategy clarified that there was a mixture of types of books in libraries across the County Borough. There is already a system of inter-lending between libraries so that a particular book can be obtained, if in stock, from any library across the

County Borough and sent to the library requesting it. The Officer informed Members that the budget reduction was targeting lesser used library materials such as DVDs and it is not anticipated that this will impact on the types of subject matter available. The Officer also confirmed to Members that there is an established book disposal policy.

With regard to the saving proposals detailed in section 4.3.11 of the Officer's report, Members discussed the removal of the Council's contribution to the Gwent Association for Voluntary Organisations (GAVO) for a Holiday Scheme Co-ordinator and the impact the removal of the Authority's contribution would have on the Youth Services. The Senior Youth Service Manager provided Members with background information relating to this contribution. The contribution originally funded an advisory post to provide support to Community Groups wanting to or running holiday schemes in order to ensure that health and safety, and safeguarding regulation requirements were met and followed. Since this post was formed, legislation has changed and it has become a more onerous process for local groups to run these schemes and so there has been a drop in the numbers of groups requiring advice and support therefore the decision was made to phase out the post. The proposal in the report is the final stage of this. In addition the Youth Service has and continues to develop these schemes in house along with support and advice mechanisms for frontline youth service staff.

Following consideration and discussion, it was moved and seconded that the report be noted. By a show of hands this was unanimously agreed

RESOLVED that the contents of the report be noted.

The meeting closed at 6.56pm

Approved as a correct record and subject to any amendments or corrections agreed and recorded in the minutes of the meeting held on 19th February 2019 they were signed by the Chair.

CHAIR