



SOCIAL SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, TREDOMEN,
YSTRAD MYNACH ON TUESDAY, 3RD DECEMBER 2019 AT 5.30 P.M.

PRESENT:

Councillor L. Binding - Chair
Councillor J. Bevan - Vice Chair

Councillors:

A. Angel, C. Bezzina, A. Gair, J. Gale, D.C. Harse, V. James, Mrs A. Leonard and S. Skivens.

Cabinet Member: C. Cuss (Social Care and Wellbeing).

Together with:

D. Street (Corporate Director - Social Services and Housing), J. Williams (Assistant Director Adult Services), G. Jenkins (Assistant Director Children's Services), M. Jones (Interim Financial Services Manager), M. Jacques (Scrutiny Officer) and C. Evans (Committee Services Officer).

Users and Carer – Mr C. Luke.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors D. Cushing, M. Evans, L. Jeremiah, B. Owen and C. Thomas, Mrs M. Jones (Co-opted Member).

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor J. Bevan declared a personal interest in Agenda Item 7 – Draft Social Services Budget Proposals for 2020/21.

Councillor C. Bezzina declared a personal interest in Agenda Item 6 – Draft Budget Proposals for 2020/2021 and Agenda Item 7 – Draft Social Services Budget Proposals 2020/21.

Councillor S. Skivens declared a personal interest in Agenda Item 6 – Draft Budget Proposals for 2020/2021, details are minuted with the respective items.

3. MINUTES – 22ND OCTOBER 2019

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Social Services Scrutiny Committee held on 22nd October 2019 (minute nos. 1 - 8) be approved and signed as a correct record.

4. CONSIDERATION OF ANY MATTER REFERRED TO THE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE CALL-IN PROCEDURE

There had been no matters referred to the Scrutiny Committee in accordance with the call-in procedure.

5. SOCIAL SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Scrutiny Officer introduced the report that informed the Committee of its Forward Work Programme planned for the period December 2019 to April 2020.

The Committee were asked to note that since the publishing of the report, it has been suggested that, the Aneurin Bevan University Health Board be asked to make Mental Health, Drug and Alcohol support the focus of their presentation to the Scrutiny Committee in March. This is in response to the key priorities outlined in the Junior & Youth Forum Priorities Report which came before the Social Services Scrutiny Committee on September 10, 2019. The presentation would replace a recommended report on the priorities raised and the Youth Forum would be invited to attend the Health Board's presentation in March.

Members were asked to consider the work programme and to make any amendments or request additional agenda items to be included for future meetings.

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

RESOLVED that subject to the aforementioned changes, the Forward Work Programme appended to the report be approved.

REPORTS OF OFFICERS

Consideration was given to the following reports.

6. DRAFT BUDGET PROPOSALS FOR 2020/21

Councillor C. Bezzina declared a personal interest in this item as she is a full-time Trade Union Officer, not covering this local authority.

Councillor S. Skivens declared a personal interest in this item as a long standing member on the Board of Trustees of the Citizens Advice Bureau.

As the declarations were personal and not prejudicial, Members were able to stay and take part in the debate and voting on this item.

The Committee welcomed Mr S. Harris, Interim Head of Business Improvement Services & Acting S151 Officer, who provided the Committee with an overview of the 2020/21 Draft Budget proposals report, which was presented to Cabinet on the 13th November 2019, and provided some context to the financial challenges that the Authority continues to face due to the ongoing programme of austerity.

It was noted that details of the Provisional Local Government Financial Settlement are normally announced by the Welsh Government in early October each year. However, due to a combination of the continuing uncertainty around Brexit the delay in undertaking the UK Government spending review, and the forthcoming General Election; the announcement of the Provisional Local Government Financial Settlement for 2020/21 has been delayed.

The Officer explained that at the time of writing the Draft Budget Proposals Report it was anticipated that the Provisional Settlement would be announced on the 26th November 2019. However, it has since been confirmed by the Welsh Government that details of the Provisional Settlement will not now be released until 16th December 2019.

To ensure that sufficient time is allocated to consult on the Council's draft budget proposals for 2020/21, Cabinet has endorsed the draft budget and associated savings proposals in advance of the announcement of the Provisional Local Government Financial Settlement.

The draft budget proposals have been used as a start point on the Medium-Term Financial Plan presented to Council on the 21st February 2019. This showed a projected 2020/21 savings requirement of £15.658m based on information available at that time. The projected position for 2020/21 has since been reviewed and based on updated information, and a revised set of assumptions, has resulted in an updated projected savings requirement of £8.485m, which is a reduction of £7.173m on the position reported in February 2019. The main reasons for this significant reduction in the savings requirement are:

- An assumed cash flat position in respect of the core funding we receive from the Welsh Government.
- An assumption that cost pressures in respect of Teachers Pensions will be fully funded; and
- A proposed increase in Council Tax of 6.95%

It was noted that details of the proposed savings totalling £8.845m were provided in Appendix 2 of the Cabinet report. Members were assured that in order to limit the impact on frontline services wherever possible, the focus has been on delivering efficiencies and through doing things differently. However, it will not be possible to achieve a balanced budget without having to make some difficult decisions and regrettably the Draft Budget Proposals do include proposed service reductions and cuts totalling £3.708m.

Officers explained that in terms of the financial outlook for future years the Medium Term Financial Plan presented to Council in February 2019 showed a potential savings requirement of £44m for the four-year period 2020/21 to 2023/24. Considerable uncertainty remains surrounding the funding position moving forward. The UK Government has completed a spending review for 2020/21 only at this stage, so there is no indication of likely funding levels in the medium to long-term. With this in mind the MTFP has been updated based on current information and a revised set of assumptions, which results in an anticipated savings requirement of £27m for the four-year period 2021/22 to 2024/24. Further details for which were outlined in Appendix 3 of the Cabinet report.

The Scrutiny Committee thanked the Officer for the report and discussion ensued.

The Chair thanked the Officer for the report and acknowledged that whilst this Committee will look at Social Services related budget information, the overarching report has been brought for comment and consideration and therefore raised a query on the impact the cuts will have on the already stretched community and voluntary sector. Officers explained that the Transformation Strategy has been developed and work has been undertaken to ensure that the Governance arrangements are in place. Fixed term appointments have been made and it is anticipated that there will be a formal launch in the new year, which will shortly be followed by the 'Caerphilly Conversation' in which community engagement will be undertaken to look at ways of working in partnerships, spread savings and minimise the impact of the austerity programme.

A Member highlighted that there should be better communication between the Council and Town and Community Councils and often Community and Town Councils are left out of decision making processes. Officers explained that this will be addressed as the Transformation Strategy moves forward and work will be undertaken to improve communication and working relationships.

Discussions took place around the Commercial Strategy, which is currently being drafted and will provide options for generating additional income, for example in areas such as tourism, which will be reinvested in non-statutory services to enable them to remain resilient and sustainable. Members were asked to note that further information will be provided in due course.

A Member raised concerns for the loss of a Language Support Officer at A09 on page 32 of the report and sought further information around this efficiency saving. Officers explained that as this is an Education Directorate saving, the information and rationale behind the saving was not available, however Members noted that the information will be made available outside of the meeting and any concerns fed back to the relevant Scrutiny Committee.

Queries were raised around Budget proposal A22 on Page 32 of the report and Members queried the budget cuts to mileage and printing. Officers explained that there would be no cut to the budget, that this item is a budget realignment and would therefore more accurately reflect the spend.

The Committee expressed their concern and disappointment that there was a proposal to merge Community Safety Wardens with Environmental Health General Enforcement Team. Members felt that this is a highly valued and utilised service that should be maintained where possible. Officers explained that this would be fed back to the relevant Scrutiny Committee.

Concerns were also raised around the proposed 2% budget reduction for Schools and additional pressures they will face to maintain a balanced budget. Officers explained that there has been mixed feedback from Head Teachers, however Members were assured that Officers are working closely with Headteachers to provide support and assistance to manage the deficit.

Members noted the proposal to withdraw the School Crossing Patrol Sites that no longer meet the National Criteria, which has been identified as a moderate risk and felt that this should be identified as a severe risk! Members were asked to note that there is a National Criteria in place which stipulates where crossing is required, and assured Members that sites where the Standard is being met would not be considered. In addition, Officers agreed to email the Criteria to Members for their information.

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

RESOLVED that the contents of the report be noted and comments of the Social Services Scrutiny Committee be included as part of the formal consultation process.

7. DRAFT SOCIAL SERVICES BUDGET PROPOSALS FOR 2020/21

Councillor C. Bezzina declared a personal interest in this item as she is a full-time Trade Union Officer, not covering this local authority.

Councillor S. Skivens declared a personal interest in this item as a long standing member on the Board of Trustees of the Citizens Advice Bureau.

Councillor J. Bevan declared a personal interest in this item as his daughter works for Barnardo's and a close family member works for Social Services.

As the declarations were personal and not prejudicial, Members were able to stay and take part in the debate and voting on this item.

The report provided the Scrutiny Committee with the proposed approach to setting the budget for the Directorate of Social Services for 2020/21.

The Committee noted the details of the proposed approach to setting the Social Services budget for 2020/2021, which outlined a range of assumptions and also provided details into the investment in preventative services and potential use of service reserves to allow these preventative measures to fully embed.

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member for the introduction and invited the Director of Social Services and Housing to provide any additional information.

The Scrutiny Committee noted that a new approach has been proposed for 2020/21, as in previous years there has been an expectation to develop a range of savings proposals in order to deliver a balanced budget, however there has also been an element of growth to assist with demographic pressures such as an ageing population and increases in Looked After Children. It was felt however, that this could not continue, and whilst every effort is made to work more efficiently, the brunt of any further budget reductions would have to be borne by public facing services. As such, work has been conducted to consider alternative ways in which financial pressures can be met moving forward. Members were asked to note that there are a number of initiatives currently underway that will reduce costs in the medium to long-term and therefore mitigate the current costs pressures in the system. The initiatives were outlined at 5.6 of the Officers report.

A Member, in noting the proposal queried the risk assessment process and how the results would be interpreted, and should the model not work how support will be given to the users. Officers explained that it is difficult to determine how the proposal can be measured at present, however, should there be any concerns, the Scrutiny Committee will be notified. Members were assured however that preventative services are proven to assist and provide more positive outcomes, but a period of bedding in will be required in order for there to be signs of improvement, but it is hoped that the proposal will be successful, ultimately providing the right support for service users.

For clarification, a Member queried whether there are any proposals to make any cuts to current services within the Budget Proposals. Officers confirmed that there are no current proposals to make any cuts and budget requirements will be managed through budget monitoring and the introduction of more preventative services.

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

RESOLVED that for the reasons contained within the Officer's Report:

- (i) the proposed approach to setting the Social Services budget, be noted;
- (ii) the intended emphasis of the range of initiatives to help mitigate current cost pressures, be noted;
- (iii) the draft 2020/21 budget proposals, inclusive of the potential use of £800k of Social Services service reserves, be endorsed.

The meeting closed at 6.29pm.

The Chair thanked Members for the attendance and participation and wished everyone a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.

Approved as a correct record, subject to any amendments agreed and recorded in the minutes of the meeting held on 4th February 2020.

CHAIR