

THE VALE OF GLAMORGAN COUNCIL

EXTRAORDINARY CORPORATE PERFORMANCE AND RESOURCES  
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE: 15<sup>TH</sup> FEBRUARY, 2024

REFERENCE FROM LEARNING AND CULTURE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE:  
8<sup>TH</sup> FEBRUARY, 2024

“ INITIAL BUDGET 2024/25 AND MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN 2024/25  
TO 2028/29 PROPOSALS FOR CONSULTATION (REF) –

Cabinet had referred the proposals to the Committee on 18<sup>th</sup> January, 2024 for consideration. The Operational Manager for Accountancy provided the Committee with an overview of the report via a PowerPoint presentation.

The report provided Members with an updated financial position for the Council following the UK Government Autumn Statement and Welsh Government Budget. The report set out the Council's proposed budget for 2024/25, including initial savings proposals and use of reserves to deliver a balanced budget for 2024/25. For context the report contained a summary of the principles set out in the Financial Strategy that had helped shape the proposals.

The purpose of the report was to provide Members with the opportunity to oversee and scrutinise the proposals and included details of future transformation and reshaping proposals to support the Council's finances in the medium term. The report also described the approach taken to developing the budget proposals, and of the process for consultation ahead of formal consideration of final budget proposals by Cabinet and Council in the coming weeks.

The report emphasised the challenge the Council had in maintaining sustainable finances and services in an environment of greatly rationed funding alongside ever increasing social care pressures. It being noted that delivering Social Services potentially took up 31% of the Council's resources, up from 29% in 2023/24 and 25% in 2015/16.

Following the presentation Councillor Hennessy enquired as to whether the Operational Manager could advise the Committee how much over budget the Council was at the current time with regard to School Transport. In response, the Manager advised that the home to school transport service was projecting an overspend of approximately £600,000. There had been some additional funding but this related to demographics in special schools and the budget did not reflect inflationary pressure. She was aware that the Education and Neighbourhood Services departments had held meetings recently to consider how the pressures could be mitigated going forward, and would be happy to follow this up with the relevant officers and advise Members of the Committee accordingly.

In response, Councillor Hennessy stated that in his view parents needed assistance in supporting getting their children to school and that further funding would benefit parents in supporting them in this regard. The Director of Learning and Skills however, advised that having regard to the transport policy if pupils were outside of the catchment area they would not be entitled to free school transport it being noted that parents would be advised of this when applying for places. Councillor Hennessy further enquired as to whether in the officers opinion schools were likely to receive any extra funding and if not would the Council be expecting to make redundancies.

The Operational Manager advised that the Council was working with schools to address budget pressures, some areas for example, being around agency costs and procurement with suggestions having been made that such areas be managed collectively. There had previously been redundancy proposals put forward to address budgetary issues it being noted that redundancies would just part of proposals being considered. The Director also advised that that day a ministerial announcement had been made regarding additional funding for Wales in relation to Social Care and to support the teachers' pay award, however, having regard to the fact that the Social Care element of it was considerable, it left little funding to support the pay award. The Director further commented that further to the Operational Manager for Accountancy's comments she was aware that some schools having regard to budget issues may very well have to consider redundancies. This the Director reiterated had also been seen during the current financial year noting that the position would be even tighter in the forthcoming year. However as previously mentioned the Council was considering a number of initiatives to support schools, acknowledging that it was a very difficult situation.

R. Goodjohn, Vale Youth Forum representative, referred to the Post 16 proposals with regard to transport, commenting that this was one of the highest priorities for young people advising that the Youth Forum were against the proposal. The increase would more than likely, he said, mean that young people would either take the car or not actually go to school at all. He felt that the proposal was targeted against rural areas acknowledging that most people in Barry could possibly walk to school. There was also the feeling that school bus services were unreliable and that increasing the charges would be, in his words, "kicking them when they were down" and he put forward a recommendation that when considering the budget the Council be requested to put school transport as a priority for Post 16 pupils.

T. Williams, Vale Youth Council, representative, enquired as to notwithstanding the use of ICT equipment, what other ways were the Council planning to reduce energy within schools. The Operational Manager advised that there were a number of decarbonisation proposals set out in the budget as contained within the next item on the agenda relating to the Capital Programme which included for example looking at the use of PV panels and heat pumps.

J. Clement, Vale Youth Council echoed R. Goodjohn's comments reaffirming that the Vale Youth Forum were opposed to the proposals relating to Post 16 transport. The Operational Manager advised that she would be more than happy to feedback the comments to the service area advising that Post 16 transport was something that the Council had been considering for some time, advising that the reason that the proposal had been put forward was because it was a non-statutory service and as

part of all the budget proposals all non-statutory services were being reviewed given the weight of the cost pressures for the Council.

Councillor Hodges highlighted that it was important for young people to be aware that the actual issue was in the failure of Welsh Government to provide the funding and drew comparisons with Scotland where transport funding was free for under 22s.

Councillor Payne queried the cost pressures relating to the demand for school places noting that there was more demand for English school places and queried what the plan would be in this regard. The Director of Learning and Skills in response advised that this was referred to in the Capital Programme report with the intention to be addressed in more detail in a future Cabinet report detailing proposals relating to a rolling programme for sustainable communities for learning.

Councillor Marshallsea enquired as to whether the ALN school in the western Vale would reduce the requirement for school transport. The Director stated that currently no land had been identified for an ALN school, but it was clear provision was required. Again, the Director referred to a future report to be presented to Cabinet in respect of a rolling programme for schools which would refer to the requirement for a second ALN school.

Following a query from Councillor Lynch-Wilson regarding the provision of an autistic spectrum facility, the Head of Additional Learning Needs and Wellbeing advised this was a growing area and it was hoped that the proposals would meet the current need recognising that it may also be a question around future need.

Councillor Gilligan asked whether the Council had received more demands for free school meal places. The Head of Service for Community Learning and Resources in response, advised that all children in primary schools were entitled to free school meals and there had been a huge uptake in families wanting to access free school meals.

Councillor Goodjohn, not a member of the Committee, with permission to speak took the opportunity to advise that school funding would be increased from 4.5% although noting a large part of the increase would be taken up by the teachers' pay rise.

The Chair subsequently enquired as to whether the Director had been advised of the funding timescales and when that funding for Education was to be received by the Council. The Operational Manager stated that she had had varying figures from Welsh Government with much of the money being proposed to be ringfenced for Social Care with other amounts coming via the Council's RSG but for schools she advised the figure would not be able to support the differential for the teachers' pay award. With regard to any further support in respect of payments for the teachers' pay award, the Director of Learning and Skills confirmed that both the Ministers for Education and Welsh Language and Finance Minister had been lobbied by most Local Authorities in Wales which had included lobbying for having regard to the potential consequences of not receiving further funding. It also being accepted that should any further money become available that the teachers' pay award and pensions be prioritised although early indications were there would be no further additional funding for the coming year.

Following consideration of the report it was subsequently.

RECOMMENDED – T H A T the revised funding and spend assumptions, along with the draft savings proposals be noted, and this Committee's views be referred for scrutiny at the Corporate Performance and Resources Scrutiny Committee, and for a composite response to be developed and referred back to a Special Cabinet on 29<sup>th</sup> February, 2024.

Reason for recommendation

Having regard to the contents of the report, and to discussions at the meeting, and to ensure that Cabinet are aware of the views of this Committee.”