



Minutes

Performance Scrutiny Committee - Place and Corporate

Date: 13 January 2020

Time: 4.00 pm

Present: Councillors C Evans (Chair), M Al-Nuaimi, G Berry, J Clarke, I Hayat, J Richards and D Williams

In Attendance: Beverly Owen (Strategic Director (Place), Paul Jones (Head of City Services), Rhys Cornwall (Head of People and Business Change), Mark Bleazard (Digital Services Manager), Gareth Price (Head of Law & Regulation), Meirion Rushworth (Head of Finance), Owen James (Assistant Head of Finance - Technical and Development), Meryl Lawrence (Scrutiny Adviser) and Neil Barnett (Governance Officer)

Apologies: Councillors K Critchley and D Fouweather

1 Declaration of Interests

None.

2 Minutes of the Previous Meetings

The Minutes of the meetings held on 4 November 2019 and 18 November 2019 were **approved** as a true and accurate record.

3 2020-21 Budget and Medium Term Financial Projections

Attendees:

- Beverly Owen – Strategic Director – Place
- Paul Jones – Head of City Services
- Rhys Cornwall – Head of People and Business Change
- Mark Bleazard – Digital Services Manager
- Gareth Price – Head of Law and Regulation
- Meirion Rushworth - Head of Finance
- Owen James – Assistant Head of Finance

APPENDIX 2 - Extracts from Scrutiny Committees

City Services

Proposal 12 - CS2021/01 - Increase in Fees

The Head of City Services clarified the proposal to increase the following two fees:

1. Increase in emergency road closure charge from £250 per event to £800 per event. This was a fee paid by utility companies and statutory undertakers when the need arises to close an adopted highway at short notice. The original lower price meant there had been more emergency road closures than need be, and caused problems with informing residents of emergency works in time.
2. Introduce a charge for waste receptacles for new build low-rise properties when residents initially occupy. There is already a charge for Houses in Multiple Occupation and this new charge is part of the Housing Supplementary Planning Guidance, but no value had been set.

Members asked the following:

- A Member asked if the fees are in line with other Councils.

The Head of City Services advised that they were broadly in line.

- A Member voiced concern about the large increase in the fees for emergency closures, and worried how this would affect community events.

The Head of City Services clarified that community events were not emergency road closures and would be classed as planned road closures.

Proposal 13 - CS2021/06 – Removal of non-statutory ALN Home to College Transport Provision and Post 16 Travel Grants to Mainstream Schools and Colleges

The Head of City Services clarified that the two grants in this proposal were for transport for pupils after finishing secondary school and the removal was proposed to be phased over the next two years so that students currently on two-year courses could complete their courses.

- Members expressed concern regarding the removal of the grants and the impact upon vulnerable people. Further concern was expressed at the potential environmental impact of the proposal to withdraw funding, which could result in an increase in traffic as parents / young people drove to college themselves and it was questioned whether some work could be undertaken with bus services on a travel card scheme, like an Oyster card.

Proposal 14 - CS2021/08 - Increased Recycling - Bag Sorting at Household Waste Recycling Centre

APPENDIX 2 - Extracts from Scrutiny Committees

The Head of City Services advised the Committee of the improved recycling performance over the year, but that recycling performance via the HWRC could be increased further. Many Councils had stopped allowing mixed bagged waste, and any mixed bagged waste brought to the HWRC intended for the non-recyclable waste skip would be taken to a designated bag sorting area. Site operatives would open bags and sort into designated containers. This would be undertaken at quieter periods, not at peak times with a view to users expecting to bring pre-separated waste to the site.

Members asked the following:

- Members voiced concern that this could create further issues with traffic tailbacks on the Southern Distributer Road.

The Head of City Services advised that this had been taken on board and the proposal is that it would be done at peak times and after Christmas and Bank Holidays, but the aim was to change behaviour so that users brought pre-separated waste to the HWRC to increase recycling further.

Proposal 15 - CS2021/13 – Car Parking – Faulkner Road

The Head of City Services advised that the Faulkner Road car park was currently being heavily used by Council staff. There had been complaints from residents and visitors about not being able to park in this public pay and display car park. The proposal sought to limit the car park spaces for Council staff to 50.

Members asked the following:

- How would the proposal affect Blue Badge holders, and would the proposed 50 staff spaces be on a first come first served basis.

Members were advised that the proposal would enable the release of more spaces for the public, including blue badge holders. In terms of allocation, Council staff were using the car park on a first come first service basis; however there would be a broader piece of work on staff car parking with HR and Asset Management going forward. The Strategic Director –Place added that a lot of feedback from staff upon the proposal was expected as part of the consultation to be fed back to the Cabinet and that it had been agreed to set up a project team to look at a focussed review of staff parking.

- A Member raised the issue of staff parking in streets near the Royal Gwent Hospital and the risk of this happening in streets around the Civic / Faulkner Road, as a potential impact from this proposal.

The Head of Service advised that was already happening in this area. There was a need to encourage staff to use other forms of transport, so if less people drove to work, there should be less impact, and the spaces would be available for public use.

APPENDIX 2 - Extracts from Scrutiny Committees

- A Member enquired whether there had been any shared learning from other organisations.

Members were advised that the proposed Project Team would look at this thoroughly as well as best practice solutions for staff parking in large companies. The Strategic Director advised that they would look at how to balance economic growth with climate change as the city grew. The review would look at how staff park and how it interfaced with public parking.

- A Member asked how the fifty spaces would be allocated, would it be fairer to remove all staff parking spaces, or should lower paid employees be able to access the spaces. He also asked could the proposal that potentially staff would have to look for parking elsewhere impact on employment.

The Head of Service advised that the Project Team set up would examine and it was currently a question of balance between public and staff parking provision. Issues with Social Workers and similarly visiting officers who need to leave the office a number of times a day and return would also be considered. Feedback from the consultation on the Budget Proposal would be fed back into Cabinet in February.

- A Member inquired about Park Square car park and whether it was a Council car park.

Members were advised that the operation of that car park should transfer to Council on 1st April.

- A Member inquired about the number of unoccupied spaces.

It was advised that demand had been considered and had edged up a little, since the start of parking enforcement.

- Members suggested that other car parks could be reviewed and places of worship or businesses may wish to buy spaces for their visitors and could consider charging staff to park.

It was advised that charging staff for parking could be one option to encourage sustainable travel.

- Members expressed concern about time being lost while staff returning to the Civic Centre between appointments circulated to find available parking.

The Chair thanked the Invitees for attending.

People and Business Change

Proposal 16 - PBC2021/03 - Public Building Wi-Fi "Community Cloud" – reductions in provision

The Head of People and Business change explained that current provision for Community Cloud had originally been put in place via the Super Connected Cities funding and since that

APPENDIX 2 - Extracts from Scrutiny Committees

ended two years ago, the Council had been funding the provision. Technology has moved on in a number of ways: a far greater 4G connectivity internet access and the amount of data for mobile users had also increased, so there was less demand for this provision. Within the financial constraints and challenges, this was a discretionary service so was being proposed for potential savings.

There were currently around 50 council and community buildings where Public Building Wi-Fi had been provided free to the public. The recommended option was to review the contract and remove service provision for some public buildings with free Community Cloud Wi-Fi, depending on usage. The availability of the Gov Wi-Fi with password access would minimise some potential impact of the proposal.

Members asked the following:

- Members enquired about the numbers of people are using the Community Cloud in these locations and the need for the provision.

It was advised that numbers for usage had not yet been aggregated as the usage at sites was currently being analysed.

- A Member asked about the impact of the proposal upon the list of 50 locations with current Community Cloud Wi-Fi access.

Members were advised that if the provision could be reduced or removed, but members of the public could use Gov Wi-Fi, by getting a password via a text. An example was given of a reduction of service at sites, that the Council may be spending £5000 at a site but only £3000 being used, so could achieve savings from downgrades to slightly slower speeds.

- A Member asked how the sites had been selected.

The Head of Service advised when Super Connected Cities came into action the infrastructure had been put in place, as free provision for whoever signed up for it. Rather than stop the provision when the funding ended, the Council carried on paying for it. The Digital Services Manager added that the proposal reflected the change to funding, and a review of usage.

- A Member advised it was important to know that communities knew where the connectivity is being taken away and expressed concern that an important link for people could be removed. Public should be consulted about the buildings the Wi-Fi may be removed from.

The Head of Service clarified that the proposal was to potentially reduce or remove some Community Cloud Wi-Fi provision, which was not the same as connectivity and advised that the list of buildings that currently had Wi-Fi access had been given to the community for consultation.

APPENDIX 2 - Extracts from Scrutiny Committees

- A Member acknowledged that while the Community Wi-Fi is good if it can be afforded, Services are faced with difficult choices.

The Head of Service assured that an evidence base of usage behind the decision would be utilised to minimise the effect.

The Chair thanked the Invitees for attending.

Law and Regulation

Proposal 17 - LR2021/04 – Reduction in Public Protection Statutory Enforcement and Prosecution work

The Head of Law and Regulation advised of the proposal to reduce staffing across three services areas. This would reduce the level of statutory enforcement and prosecution work carried out by the Public Protection service and focus on more serious, higher risk offences. Although these were statutory functions, it was a strategic decision for the Council as to how to discharge its statutory enforcement duties.

Members asked the following:

- Members voiced their concerns regarding the reduction in service.

The Head of Service advised that the service area had been given a target for reduction. Previously areas that could have work reduced had been cut, so the only thing left to offer up is reduction in service and staffing levels. Examples of previous efficiency savings were given, including: restructuring the Public Protection department and ways that services were delivered. Collaborative regional working had also been explored for Trading Standards, but came out as a more expensive option than in-house provision.

- A Member voiced concern at a reduction in service for a statutory service and the potential impact of the proposal.

The Head of Service advised that the proposal is to reduce cut back on proactive spot checks and gave assurance that the service would still respond to complaints. The Housing Response Team would first refer residents to the landlord. Currently they carried out inspections on every complaint, but there would be a triage service for risk and response, e.g. landlords complaints made via tenants. The Head of Service advised that this was a reducible minimum, close to core service and that the proposal was not being put forward lightly.

- A Member asked whether there were any other options.

Members were advised that the Council had a statutory duty to provide the core service but had discretion on how it discharged the service provided.

APPENDIX 2 - Extracts from Scrutiny Committees

- A member questioned the use of temporary agencies for staff, which could take away cost savings.

The Head of Service advised Members that temporary agency staff would not be replacing staff, but had been used to fill a post while reviewing.

- A Member queried how vacant post could be realised as a saving.

The Head of Service advised that the posts were factored into the budget, and would be deleted and would try to avoid compulsory redundancy.

The Chair thanked the Invitee for attending.

Finance and Non-Service

Proposal 18 - NS2021/01 – Council Tax Reduction Scheme

The Head of Finance advised that the Council Tax Reduction Scheme budget was used to subsidise household Council Tax bills when occupants are eligible for support because of income levels. This budget had been underspent for a number of years due to lower numbers of claimants. The proposal is predicated on reducing the budget to the level of demand, which would, over the three years shown, reduce the current level of underspending on this budget. It was proposed that the budget is reduced over a three-year period.

Members asked the following:

- A Member inquired about the impact of the reduction.

The Head of Finance advised that the scheme was an 'All Wales national scheme' with nationally set criteria for eligibility and support levels and that the proposal to reduce the budget to take into account the level of underspend had no impact on the scheme nor the recipients.

Proposal 19 - N/A – Increase in Council Tax

The Head of Finance advised of the draft proposal for an increase of 7.95% and that it was well documented that Newport's council tax is low compared to other Local Authorities in Wales. He advised that Newport had the second lowest council tax levels in Wales. The Welsh Government uses the Standard Spending Assessment (SSA) to calculate the level of spending required to deliver a 'standard level' of service in each council area. However, Newport's actual spend was well below its SSA (around £8.3m in 2019/20), which is mainly due to its low level of council tax funding.

APPENDIX 2 - Extracts from Scrutiny Committees

The Head of Finance advised the Committee that the Cabinet's Draft Budget Proposals had been developed ahead of receipt of the Local Government Settlement being received and that subsequently; Cabinet had flexibility of around £7M to consider its final budget proposals following consultation responses and any proposed new investments.

Members asked the following:

- A Member asked what was the % RSG.

The Assistant Head of Service advised that with a 5.4% increase, they need to take into account assumptions in the report such as pay awards and pension increases out of any RSG.

- A Member questioned whether it was possible that the 7.95% increase could be lower, given the flexibility.

The Head of Service advised that it would be a consideration, but that only last week the minimum wage had gone up by 6%, which was much higher than planned for, so currently considering a range of issues.

- A Member asked whether Newport could end up in the middle of the table on page 73, when compared with other authorities.

Members were advised that Newport would not be in the middle of the table, as the table contained the current years' council tax before other authorities' increases were added. It was predicted that Newport would be in the bottom 3 or 4, or possibly second lowest.

- A Member enquired whether there is a cap in Wales upon Council Tax.

Members were advised that there is no capping regime in Wales.

- A Member referred to future financial difficulties in paragraph 1.5, page 26 of the report and more savings need to be found; at least £22M by 2023 based upon current planning assumptions and asked the Officers when would local authorities be out of austerity and financial pressures.

The Head of Finance advised that he could not give a prediction, as it was a matter for national government. Following the national budget on 11th March 2020, the Fiscal Team at Cardiff University would analyse it to predict the Welsh Budget.

- A Member asked whether the budget process was the same as last year.

The Head of Service advised that the Budget Process was the same as the previous year, however The Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee had each year asked for a more strategic approach to a longer term MTFP and there was a need to move to a more strategic approach to plan further ahead.

APPENDIX 2 - Extracts from Scrutiny Committees

- A Member commented that if possible, the increase of Council tax should be kept to a minimum, because of the impact on residents and in light of the better than expected Local Government Settlement.

Conclusion - Comments to the Cabinet

The Committee noted the Draft Budget Proposals relevant to the Place and Corporate Service Areas and agreed to forward the minutes to the Cabinet as a summary of the issues raised.

The Committee wished to make the following comments to the Cabinet on the Proposals within the Place and Corporate Service Areas:

Proposal 13 - CS2021/06 - Removal of non-statutory ALN Home to College Transport Provision and Post 16 Travel Grants to Mainstream Schools and Colleges

- The Committee requested that this Proposal be removed, due to the impact on vulnerable people and potential environmental impact and the flexibility within the Budget from the Local Government Settlement.

Proposal 14 - CS2021/08 - Increased Recycling – Bag Sorting at Household Waste Recycling Centre

- The Committee expressed concern regarding the potential impact of an increase in traffic backed up on the Southern Distributer Road, but acknowledged that an assurance had been provided that Bag Sorting would not be done at peak times and would work towards changing behaviour and increasing recycling at the HWRC.

Proposal 15 - CS2021/13 - Car Parking – Faulkner Road

- The Committee requested that the removal of 50 staff parking spaces from Faulkner road Car Park should not impact upon the lowest paid and also needed to take account of staff such as social workers and visiting officers who frequently went out on visits and returned to the Civic Centre a number of times daily.
- The Committee felt that the Business case could have been more detailed, but acknowledged that the Project Team upon Staff Car Parking would be set up to facilitate a thorough review of staff car parking.

APPENDIX 2 - Extracts from Scrutiny Committees

Proposal 16 - PBC2021/03 - Public Building Wi-Fi “Community Cloud” – reductions in provision

- The Committee commented that details of the specific buildings to be affected by the removal or reduction of Community Cloud Wi-Fi was required, to obtain meaningful consultation upon the proposal.

Proposal 17 - LR2021/04 - Reduction in Public Protection Statutory Enforcement and Prosecution work

- The Committee expressed its concern about the proposed reduction in service, despite the assurance that the core service would be delivered and requested that if there was flexibility in the Budget, the proposal be re-examined.

The meeting closed at 18:00

Minutes



Performance Scrutiny Committee - People

APPENDIX 2 - Extracts from Scrutiny Committees

Date: 14 January 2020

Time: 10.00 am

Present: Councillors D Williams (Chair), J Cleverly, M Linton, H Thomas, C Townsend, T Watkins, J Richards and S Marshall

In Attendance: C Humphrey (Interim Strategic Director - People), S Morgan (Chief Education Officer), M Rushworth (Head of Finance), C Watts (Senior Finance Business Partner), M Lawrence (Scrutiny Adviser) and L Thomas (Governance Officer)

Apologies: Councillor J Watkins
Dr A Daly (Diocese Representative)

2 Declarations of Interest

Councillor T Watkins declared an interest in the Frailty Service referred to in the Business Case for Proposal 4, as a family member had recently been a service user.

3 Minutes of Previous Meetings

The Minutes of the meetings held on 5th and 19th November 2019 were **approved** as a true and accurate record.

4 2020-21 Budget and Medium Term Financial Projections (MTFP)

Attendees:

- Chris Humphrey, Interim Strategic Director - People
- Meirion Rushworth - Head of Finance
- Sarah Morgan – Chief Education Officer
- Clare Watts – Senior Finance Business Partner

The Interim Strategic Director – People offered the apologies of the Head of Children and Young People Services to the Committee, as she was unable to attend this meeting.

Adult and Community Services

Proposal 1 - AS2021/04 – Reduction in Day Opportunities Budget

APPENDIX 2 - Extracts from Scrutiny Committees

The Interim Strategic Director - People reported that the proposed £100k savings were an underspend, as a result of the number of people who attended the Day Opportunities service reducing. A range of activities was offered over a week, but some in the community rather than in one base, so provision and staffing required had been adjusted accordingly.

Members asked the following:

3. A Member stated that the underspend figure of £100k was significant and queried where this figure came from and asked about partnerships with the Health and Voluntary Sector.

The Interim Strategic Director - People advised that the Mental Health Day Service at Brynglas had reduced from 5 days to 3 days. The Service was being provided in a different way by providing support in the community and by working closely with the Health Board and agencies such as MIND and Growing Spaces. Any vacancies had also been held.

4. A Member queried how placing more services in third sector organisations could be sustained, given the reduction in the funding / budgets some of the organisations were facing.

The Interim Strategic Director - People explained that some of those partners had been successful in drawing down funding from other sources, and they had worked closely with the organisations to redesign services, as they had secure funding. Whilst the organisations had been involved in the development, funding continued to be a challenge for Local authorities and the Third Sector and it was recognised that there were no guarantees for future resilience.

Proposal 2 - AS2021/05 - Telecare Service

The Interim Strategic Director - People explained that work upon reconfiguring the service had been underway for a while. Previously mainly in-house, the service was now provided in partnership with Monmouthshire Council to install equipment and Caerphilly Council to monitor calls. The Service was in the process of withdrawing from the previous service contract with Worcester Telecare and had also been able to draw down funding from the Integrated Care Fund and draw down equipment upon demand, so it didn't become out of date. The cost of the Service had been standardised so service users were billed the same charge and received the same level of service, which had made the running costs of the service more sustainable and it was a better service.

Members asked the following:

5. A Member asked if there an increase in cost to the user and what use was being made of new technology.

APPENDIX 2 - Extracts from Scrutiny Committees

The Interim Strategic Director - People explained that the price had been fixed in between the price of the two previous providers resulting in a slight increase or slight decrease to service users.

The service now sat within the Occupational Therapy team and they were looking into increased use of new technology, such as using Alexa to prompt reminders to take medication. Although this helped reduce non-essential visits from carers, this would only be part of users care package.

6. A Member asked what additional funding was the Council receiving for providing the Telecare Service and would this be a regular income.

The Interim Strategic Director - People replied that capital expenditure had been reduced due to a successful bid for regional ICF funding for provision of equipment and this funding was guaranteed from Welsh Government until 2021.

Proposal 3 - AS2021/07 - Reduction in funding awarded to third sector organisations

The Interim Strategic Director - People briefly outlined recommendations to reduce funding to the following Third Sector Organisations by the figures outlined in the report to: Growing Space; Hafal; Mind; Deaf Clubs; People First; Citizens Advice Bureau; and Carers Grant.

Members asked the following:

7. A Member queried whether a Fairness and Equalities Impact Assessment (FEIA) had been completed for this Budget Proposal, as the Business Case stated that it required one, but one had not been published.

The Interim Strategic Director – People advised that a FEIA had been completed for the Proposal and should have been published.

8. A Member expressed concern that that for some of the third sector organisations this proposal represented a substantial loss of income, particularly if future EU funding were to be lost and could the Council look at ways of helping these organisations seek funding from other sources.

The Interim Strategic Director - People responded by saying that most of these partners understood the environment worked under and part of the conversations held with them, were around helping them look for alternative funding from other sources.

9. A Member commented that the Citizens Advice Bureau was a vital service for many and questioned the savings proposal and asked what other funding CAB had.

The Interim Strategic Director - People confirmed that CAB were supported by funding from Adult and Community Services, Corporate funding, Supporting People and Welsh Government Funding streams. Rolling the Council support into one contract would make

APPENDIX 2 - Extracts from Scrutiny Committees

it easier for CAB to manage delivery and would still be sustainable to continue as an important service.

10. A Member asked how no reduction in service could be ensured, given the removal of funding from third party organisations, and whether the funding still met the objectives of the Council.

The Interim Strategic Director – People advised that most of the organisations are national charities and are realistic and had worked with the Service upon the proposed saving, and she advised that the funding still met the objectives of the Council.

11. A Member expressed concern that the budget savings proposal for CAB and the impact, needed to be made clear to the public in consultation, that the Council was not removing all of its funding, but rolling support into one contract.

The Interim Strategic Director confirmed that the public consultation was already underway and would be fed back to the Cabinet in February.

12. A Member questioned the proposed reduction of £20k Carers Grant.

The Interim Strategic Director - People explained that the availability of significant Welsh Government ICF funding through a Grant specifically for Carers had increased the resource for Carers, so the existing budget of £40k had been underutilised and was being reduced by £20K.

Proposal 4 - AS2021/08 - Staffing Review

The Interim Strategic Director - People explained that the budget proposal involved an internal review of existing staffing resources, taking into account any existing vacancies in order to put in place a sustainable staffing structure, whilst trying to maintain front-line services.

Members asked the following:

13. A Member queried the cost to the Council of agreeing to any requests for voluntary redundancy.

The Head of Finance confirmed that it would be up to the Head of Service to accept a request or not and if a role was deemed to still be required, then the request would always be refused. Whilst a voluntary redundancy would be preferable to a compulsory redundancy, the Head of Service would consider the needs of the service first and refuse the request if the post were still required. The Interim Strategic Director – People advised

APPENDIX 2 - Extracts from Scrutiny Committees

that redundancies were not being considered at that moment, restructuring was being explored and hopefully could avoid redundancies.

14. A Member queried the figure of 9 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) posts affected by this particular proposal.

The Interim Strategic Director - People clarified that this was not 9 individual staff but that the total individual savings through, for example, changes to working patterns would equate to 9 FTEs.

15. A Member praised the service, however added that some adjustment could be made to the scheduling of calls to limit carers travelling back and forth between the East and West of the City.

Children and Family Services

A Member advised the Interim Strategic Director asked whether a Fairness and Equalities Impact Assessment (FEIA) had been completed for Budget Proposals 5, 6 and 7, as the Business Cases stated that they required one, but none had been published.

The Interim Strategic Director – People advised that FEIAs had been completed for the Proposals and should have been published.

Proposal 5 - CFS2021/02 - Family Support Services - Barnado's Partnership

The Interim Strategic Director - People outlined the proposal to reduce the current budget by £75k from £600k, reconfiguring the staffing team and using ICF funding to do some work in-house instead of by Barnado's, so accessing other funds to mitigate the saving and the impact on the service was not significant.

Members asked the following:

16. Concern was expressed about the "lower capacity to accept referrals and a potential impact on the number of children in care" referred to in the Business Case, on page 65 of the report.

The Interim Strategic Director - People responded that any change would have a consequence, but the Service would be reconfigured to manage the change and that

APPENDIX 2 - Extracts from Scrutiny Committees

these proposed changes had been discussed with Barnados. The ICF and Transformation Grant funding would assist, although there would be some impact by the proposal.

Proposal 6 - CFS2021/05 - Staffing across Children's Services

The Interim Strategic Director - People outlined the proposal and referred to the Business Case.

Members asked the following:

17. A Member expressed concern regarding the funding shift from core to grant funding for unaccompanied asylum seeking children and the sustainability of that funding post-Brexit and asked whether the posts were permanent, or temporary and linked to the funding.

Members were advised that in the event that the grant disappears in the future, then a case would be made to seek core funding. It was confirmed that posts were permanent, but their funding would change.

18. A Member expressed concern about the proposed removal of posts, in particular social workers, potentially creating pressure on service resilience and moving pressures elsewhere in the service.

The Interim Strategic Director - People responded by saying that whilst there would always be a need for social workers, there could be flexibility in how the teams operated. Service demands changed over time, with reduction in demands in certain areas and increases in others, so some services needed restructuring. Posts could also be funded in alternative ways. The posts had been identified because some mitigation was possible and so the risk to the service could be minimised.

19. A Member asked whether this proposal included a full review, or had just focussed on vacant posts to utilise as a saving.

The Interim Strategic Director – People responded that the proposal contained a mixed approach and included some vacant posts, restructuring and some alternative funding streams.

Proposal 7 - CFS2021/06 - Reduction of posts across Children's Services

The Interim Strategic Director - People outlined the proposal and referred to the Business Case.

APPENDIX 2 - Extracts from Scrutiny Committees

Members asked the following:

- 20.** A Member asked whether the whole of the Service was being restructured.

The Interim Strategic Director- People Reduction in demands in certain areas and an increase in others meant that staff could be utilised in the areas of most need. Whilst this was not the result of a major restructure, it was an opportunity to improve how the service worked and look for potential savings at the same time.

- 21.** A Member commented that they recognised the difficulties facing Heads of Service in carrying out this type of staffing review and applauded the staff for continuing to carry out their required roles whilst these often difficult decisions were being made.

A Member asked whether a Fairness and Equalities Impact Assessment (FEIA) had been completed for Budget Proposals 5, 6 and 7 above, as the Business Cases stated that they required one, but none had been published.

The Interim Strategic Director - People advised that FEIAs had been completed for the Proposal and should have been published.

Education

Proposal 8 - EDU2021/01 – Education Welfare Service Savings Proposals

The Chief Education Officer outlined the proposal and referred to the Business Case.

Members asked the following:

- 22.** Members expressed their concern that a reduction in the number of Educational Welfare Officers would have a detrimental impact on school attendance and subsequent Estyn reports, putting pressure on individual schools and queried if there were any alternative funding streams identified to schools to apply for directly.

The Chief Education Officer confirmed that whilst poor attendance was certainly linked to poor Estyn reports, there were other factors also taken into consideration. Whilst attendance figures across the City had improved, the loss of 2 Educational Welfare Officer posts would mean the need to focus more closely on those schools, which were

APPENDIX 2 - Extracts from Scrutiny Committees

seen as a priority. At the moment EWOs focussed on those pupils with 85% or less attendance and schools focussed on the higher levels. There was a good working relationship with schools and a constant reassessment in seeking flexible funding grants that schools could utilise. Regular half- term meetings with schools provided the opportunity to share information on best practice within schools and any grants which may be available.

23. Members asked if some children still took holidays during term time and also queried if there had been any increase in the level of pupils receiving free school meals.

The Chief Education Officer confirmed that there were still instances of holidays being taken during term time and that parents were issued fixed penalty notices for this. No profit could be made from fixed penalty fines; the income received covered the administration costs and was reinvested in family engagement via the Education Service.

24. A Member commented that there was certainly a drop off in the uptake of free school meals for pupils transferring from Primary to Secondary education, possibly due to the opting in/out methods in place and suggested that this needed to be looked into as levels of funding could be affected.

Proposal 9 - EDU2021/02 - Reduction of the Inclusion Enrichment Team

The Chief Education Officer outlined the proposal and referred to the Business Case.

Members asked the following:

25. A Member expressed concern that there were currently long waiting lists for referred pupils to be seen by an educational psychologist and asked what impact the proposal would have and what the effect would be cluster wise.

The Chief Education Officer advised that whilst this proposal would certainly have an impact on schools, there was a need to look closely at this area of work to assess where the loss could be most easily managed and it would probably not affect psychologist posts but other areas. Cluster wise the proposal could slow down processes and could reduce the amount of teacher training.

26. A Member asked how the service compared with other Authorities' services and whether resources could be shared with other Authorities.

APPENDIX 2 - Extracts from Scrutiny Committees

The Chief Education Officer advised that there was not any sharing of resources between Authorities, however, there was a sharing of information strategically between Heads of Inclusion.

Proposal 10 - EDU2021/03 - Gwent Music Service Reduction in Hardship Funding

The Chief Education Officer outlined the proposal and referred to the Business Case.

Members asked the following:

27. A Member stressed the importance of supporting music and the arts facilities within schools because of their enrichment qualities for pupils, and for less advantaged pupils in particular. Whilst recognising Newport's contribution to the service, the proposed reduction represented a significant amount and would have a big impact on the pupils.

The Chief Education Officer responded by saying that music services across the region in general were struggling for funding and that work was ongoing to seek access to additional funds. Whilst helping and supporting, there was a need to be mindful that Newport's contribution was greater than the other contributors.

28. A Member asked if there was other support provided to the Gwent Music Service by the Authority.

The Chief Education Officer advised that support was provided by the use of buildings, and the Music Service had been successful in securing a large grant last year and was waiting to hear about the same grant this year.

29. A Member asked whether the Pupil Deprivation Grant was the same in Wales as in England and whether it could be used for Music.

The Chief Education Officer confirmed that it was the same, but that schools had to use it to ensure pupils do as well as they could. It could be used for Music and in some schools it was used for music taster sessions to garner enthusiasm, or group lessons, 1 to 1s or group ensembles on weekends. A school applied if they had a child in need. A review of Gwent Music's policy on the use of hardship / deprivation grant could provide clarity.

30. A Member queried how the Authority is working to signpost grants from the Arts etc. to give pupils a broader culture.

APPENDIX 2 - Extracts from Scrutiny Committees

The Chief Education Officer advised that the Music Service Manager had volunteered to lead the All Wales work on accessing additional funds, which looked to achieve sustainability and help to support.

Proposal 11 EDU2021/04 – Improved Budget Efficiency within Education Services

The Chief Education Officer referred to the Business Case to review the Gwent Education Minority Ethnic Services (GEMS) management charge and transfer the Key Stage 2 Pupil Referral Unit provision to an alternative and improved location.

Members asked the following:

31. A Member enquired whether transport was provided for those attending the relocated PRU.

The Chief Education Officer confirmed that transport was provided for those not living within walking distance.

Schools Funding - Section 3 of the Cabinet Report

32. A Member expressed concern at the statement in paragraph 3.11, page 29 of the Cabinet report attached as Appendix A, regarding Schools and the impact upon the Council's overall Budget of Schools' overspending:

“The level of in year overspending was highlighted as a risk in 2018/19 and continues to be a significant area of concern. Schools have used £1.7m from school reserves over the last 2 years to fund overspending on their budgets and current projections of £3.1m overspending would see reserve balances fall to zero at the end of this current 2019/20 financial year. Officers continue to work closely with schools to ensure that deficit recovery plans are in place and that action is taken to reduce spend. This resolution is critical as current spending levels in schools is not sustainable and has the potential to cause a significant and adverse impact on the councils overall finances if it continues.”

The Head of Finance confirmed that if a school were to go into a negative balance financially then the Council would have the impact of the deficit. The Service worked very closely with schools to assess overspending issues and, where necessary, examined their business and recovery plans. Based on current forecasts there would be no capacity to overspend next year and given this challenge, it was vital that the Council continued to review carefully all budget pressures regularly and ensure that services operated in such a way as to manage demands effectively.

APPENDIX 2 - Extracts from Scrutiny Committees

33. Members were concerned that Governing Bodies be made aware of the implications of any deficits overspends upon the Council's ability to balance its budget.

The Chief Education Officer commented that the message was communicated via a variety of methods: in Schools Forums and the Minutes sent to all schools, which should be read by all governors; at regular Headteacher meetings there was always a discussion about finance and the need for schools to look after their own finances and balance their budgets. It was stressed that they recognise the need to be responsible and make challenging decisions where necessary. Headteachers also held their own meeting with Governors and so they should be aware of the challenges being faced by their respective schools.

The Chief Education Officer proposed a Briefing Note could be sent to each Governing Body to remind them of the need to set a balanced budget, the impact of individual school's deficits upon the Council's Budget, the need to pull in the forecasted deficits and that individual school reviews could assist them where necessary.

The Head of Finance advised that Cabinet had approved the draft proposals and were now consulting upon them and were aware of the schools' position and the need to balance. School reserves would be close to, if not zero by the end of the year and there would be no capacity to absorb overspends next year. Schools needed to recognise that they could not exist in isolation and that any overspend or budget issue affected the whole city and other services collectively as a Council.

The Head of Finance reminded the Committee that the Cabinet's Draft Budget Proposals had been developed ahead of the Local Government Settlement being received and that subsequently Cabinet had flexibility of around £7M to consider its final budget proposals following consultation and any proposed new investments. He advised the Committee of the need to clearly articulate in the Minutes its comments upon specific proposals, for consideration by the Cabinet as part of the consultation.

The Chair thanked the Invitees for attending.

Conclusion - Comments to the Cabinet

The Committee noted the budget proposals relevant to the People Service Areas and agreed to forward the minutes to the Cabinet as a summary of the issues raised.

The Committee wished to make the following comments to the Cabinet on the Proposals within the People Service Areas:

APPENDIX 2 - Extracts from Scrutiny Committees

General Comments

34. The Committee commented upon the inconsistency of the completion of Business Cases, with varying levels of detail provided.
35. The Committee expressed concern that not all the Fairness and Equalities impact Assessments identified as being required in Business Cases had been made available, and published as required.

Proposal 3 - AS2021/07 - Reduction in funding awarded to third sector organisations

36. Citizens Advice Bureau:
The Committee expressed concern that the work of the CAB was essential and vital in the economic climate and the need to ensure it was not undermined. The budget savings proposal for CAB and the impact needed to be made clear to the public in consultation, that the Council was not removing all of its funding, but rolling support into one contract.
37. Growing Space:
The Committee was concerned about the sustainability of the service's funding beyond the ending of the European funding.
38. Mind:
The Committee was concerned about a potential future shortfall, if future funding streams via the Consortium ceased.
39. Deaf Club:
The Committee asked whether the organisation could be assisted / signposted towards premises.
40. Carers Grant:
The Committee was concerned about a potential future shortfall, if future funding from the Welsh Government Integrated Care Funding ceased post 2021.

Proposal 5 - CFS2021/02 - Family Support Services - Barnado's Partnership

41. The Committee expressed concern about the impact of this proposal upon "lower capacity to accept referrals and a potential impact upon the number of children in care" referred to in the business Case, and also the potential future cost to the Authority if future funding from the Welsh Government Integrated Care Fund ceased post 2021.

APPENDIX 2 - Extracts from Scrutiny Committees

Social Services Proposals:

42. The Committee expressed concern that the need for social services was increasing whilst the proposals being considered across Adult and Community Services and Children and Family Services totalled a reduction of over £1M, a large proportion upon the redesign of services and removal of staffing. Concern was expressed over the reliance upon ICF and Transformation Grant funding and future funding pressures, should these WG funding streams be discontinued post 2021.

Proposal 8 - EDU2021/01 – Education Welfare Service Savings Proposals

43. The Committee expressed concerned about the impact the proposed reduction of 2 FTE Educational Welfare Officers would have upon school attendance, and in the longer term schools going into special measures and the pressure upon schools.

Proposal 9 - EDU2021/02 - Reduction of the Inclusion Enrichment Team

44. The Committee expressed concern about the proposal to reduce the Inclusion Team, the effect upon service users and the reduction in teacher training, and felt strongly that the reduction should not affect the Ed Psych front line service. The Committee requested that the Cabinet remove this proposal, given the flexibility in the Budget since the receipt of the Local Government Settlement

Proposal 10 - EDU2021/03 - Gwent Music Service Reduction in Hardship Funding

45. The Committee were concerned about the proposed removal of part of the subsidy for hardship funding, due to the likely impact upon disadvantaged children. The Committee requested that the Cabinet remove this proposal, given the flexibility in the Budget since the receipt of the Local Government Settlement.
46. The Committee suggested that Gwent Music be requested to review its policy on the use of hardship / deprivation grant to provide clarity.

Schools Funding:

- The Committee recommended the development of a more strategic 3 year Council Medium Term Financial Planning process, which would assist with planning the Council's Budget further ahead and link with planning further ahead for schools funding.

APPENDIX 2 - Extracts from Scrutiny Committees

- The Committee endorsed that a Briefing Note be sent to each Governing Body to remind them of the need to set a balanced budget, the impact of individual school's deficits upon the Council's Budget, the need to pull in the forecasted deficits and that individual school reviews could assist them where necessary.

The Chair advised the Committee that this would be the Scrutiny Adviser's last Scrutiny Committee meeting before she left the Authority to take up her new post, thanked her for her support and wished her well for the future.

The meeting terminated at 1.00 pm