

Draft Minutes



Performance Scrutiny Committee – People

Date: 25th January 2022

Time: 10am

Venue: Microsoft Teams Meeting

Present: Councillors J Cleverly, Y Forsey, L Lacey, S Marshall, J Richards, T Suller, H Thomas, C Townsend, J Watkins and T Watkins, Robert Green (Assistant Head of Finance), Sally-Ann Jenkins (Strategic Director for Social Services), Sarah Morgan (Head of Education), Kathryn Carter (Senior Finance Business Partner), 0043onnor Hall (Scrutiny Advisor), Samantha Schanzer (Governance Support Officer)

Apologies: Meirion Rushworth (Head of Finance)

Scrutiny advisor opened the floor for nominations the chair was absent. A chairman was nominated and agreed. The chair began the meeting.

1. Apologies for Absence

Councillor W Routley (Chair) and Meirion Rushworth.

2. Declarations of Interest

None.

3. Minutes of the Previous Meeting: held 30th November 2021

A committee member asked for feedback regarding active travel in schools.

The minutes of the previous meeting held 30th November 2021 were **accepted as a true and accurate record.**

4. 2022-23 Budget and Medium Term Financial Projections

Invitees:

Meirion Rushworth – Head of Finance

Sally-Ann Jenkins – Strategic Director of Social Services

Sarah Morgan – Head of Education

Robert Green – Assistant Head of Finance

The Assistant Head of Finance introduced the report and gave an overview.

Questions:

What are the long term effects of the report?

- The Assistant Head of Finance informed committee that Welsh Government gave an indicative funding settlement figure for 2023-24 and 2024-25, which was not as high as the current year. The Assistant Head of Finance noted that this does mean that there is a broadly balanced medium term plan, and while it is based on assumptions, to be in this position was a market improvement.

Whether the balance in hand referenced in the report was the reserve?

- The Assistant Head of Finance clarified that balance in hand referred to budget yet to be allocated. The Assistant Head of Finance informed committee that they knew what core funding would be available and were making assumptions based on this.

A committee member highlighted the importance of indicative funding settlement figures.

- The Assistant Head of Finance agreed and informed committee that it was something that had been asked for as it enables long term planning and better decision making. The Assistant Head of Finance also noted that changes to data collection would be beneficial to Newport in the near future.

What consultations have taken place on the budget and how can we learn from them?

- The Assistant Head of Finance felt it was best for colleagues from specific service areas to comment on this but informed committee that the main consultation was currently underway, with draft budget conversations taking place with Leader and Cabinet. The Assistant Head of Finance noted that they would further engage with Scrutiny, Schools Budget Forum, Employee Partnership Forum and other mediums as well as the public on this matter.

How would free school meals for students outside of term time affect the budget?

- The Assistant Head of Finance informed committee that Welsh Government include a tab on grants to be issued throughout the year in their budget settlement information, which showed a new grant stream that would be put towards that initiative. The Assistant Head of Finance informed committee that they had been allocated £40m but were waiting for more details. The Assistant Head of Finance informed committee that this would only cover part of the year as it was not due to begin until September and would be phased in. Welsh Government had been clear that funding would only cover the gap between meals currently being provided and they were waiting for clarity on whether it would also cover holidays. The Assistant Head of Finance noted that if Welsh Government decide to continue provision through summer

holidays and beyond, there would be an expectation for grant funding to do this.

What would happen if funding was not made available by Welsh Government for this?

- The Assistant Head of Finance noted that the authority would have to decide to continue to provide beyond Welsh Government's expectations.

What risks were involved with financing and funding the National Care Service?

- The Assistant Head of Finance informed committee that no information was contained in the settlement specifically around the National Care Service. The Assistant Head of Finance explained that this was a longer term policy ambition and that there was no further clarity at the moment, and would have to continue on the basis they currently have.

Whether there were any further differences to the budget because of new changes?

- The Assistant Head of Finance noted the increase to National Insurance, which was a UK Government initiative and would be collected through the increase of employer's rate of national insurance. The Assistant Head of Finance highlighted that the Welsh Government had seen a generous settlement from the UK core block funding, including the share of anticipated funding this would create. The Assistant Head of Finance noted there was reference in the letter that came with it from Welsh Government that this would be used to pay staff what they merited, specifically in social care and in providing real living wage that had been factored into these budgets.

It was commented that there didn't seem to be a policy of cost-cutting.

- The Assistant Head of Finance informed committee that no new savings were being sought as the Local Authority had a balance in hand. The Assistant Head of Finance encouraged service areas to continue to look for value for money and efficiency despite this.

EDUCATION

What support were Newport City Council giving schools in the implementation of the new curriculum.

- The Head of Education informed committee that schools were supported on a bespoke and universal level. The Head of Education noted that specific professional learning courses were being provided for all staff but were also to support professional learning lead within school. The Head of Education noted that it was the responsibility of schools to determine what the curriculum would look like. The Head of Education acknowledged the difficulty staff face regarding attending meetings and allowing alternative work to be done by teachers during the pandemic for a number of reasons but assured committee that the Local Authority and Partner Challenge Advisors met with

Headteachers on a rotation basis to see progress, advise on next steps and establish what support would be required. The Head of Education noted that feedback was given to the Welsh Government regarding these.

Did Newport City Council have the ability to assist if schools were having difficulties

- The Head of Education noted that they had decided against auditing schools to alleviate some pressure schools face but continued with meetings to discuss support required.

Whether there was a need for more school places?

- The Head of Education informed committee that in the planning of school places, predictions are made using the numbers of pupils coming through in the medium to long term that dictate whether bubble classes are required, which in this instance they are for the medium term. The Head of Education noted that these predictions can change regularly due to many factors but were focusing on projections through the groups to organise any changes going forward.
- The committee member asked whether predictions had under-predicted regarding the Jubilee Park School as the need seemed to be greater than the provision.
- The Head of Education informed committee that that school had been based on developer lead predictions.

A committee member asked whether there was a potential for similar issues to occur.

- The Head of Education noted additional spaces had been factored into the development of the Whitehead school and the Pillgwenlly school would be changed to Welsh provision.
- The Head of Education noted that the authority could not afford to build schools where there was no evidence for their need. The Head of Education informed committee that Welsh Government monitor surplus places and therefore the authority shouldn't have too many.

Was Jubilee Park a lesson learned or likely to have a duplicate situation in future?

- The Head of Education assured committee that they were always reflective, but couldn't call it a lesson learned as they would have to do a total review.

Would ALN programme changes be in all schools and how could parents arranged for children to be assessed?

- The Head of Education informed committee that the expectation was a focus on early intervention work with parents to ensure children's needs are met without needing a statement. The Head of Education felt there were better

ways to distribute funding to schools for them to put in place better universal and targeted provision.

- The Head of Education noted that schools would work together through a cluster lead.

Had there had been money allocated for training staff for ALN?

- The Head of Education confirmed that a variety of funding and support had been made available over the years, and networks of groups had been set up to ensure that they are prepared and supported, and this is replicated with head teachers.

What measures and finance were being put in place for supporting children with mental health issues?

- The Head of Education informed committee that there were a number of support mechanisms, including additional funding for school-based counselling which they could self-refer to. The Head of Education noted the distinct funding for whole school approach to mental and emotional wellbeing.

Were there any figures for children in all schools that had disabilities and mental health issues?

- The Head of Education informed committee that they recorded children who are ALN and the types of ALN they have and monitored trends.
- The Head of Education informed committee that data was kept for numbers of children referred to school based counselling to monitor usage and demand.

A committee member asked whether teachers were trained in ALN and mental health issues before being allowed to teach.

- The Head of Education confirmed that ALN and mental and emotional issues were covered in university courses for teachers and that there were induction programmes across the region managed by EAS which focus on emotional wellbeing that is completed within their first teaching year.

How healthy were school budgets?

- The Head of Education noted that there were 8-10 schools in previous years that were in deficit, which had reduced to 4 schools in March 2021, and now only 3 schools were in deficit at present with the potential to reduce to 1.
- The Head of Education noted that Welsh Government passed on significant grants into school budgets that factor into school total surplus but are only a temporary position.

Were there any further areas of risk to be budgeted in?

- The Head of Education highlighted the hardship funding ending which could jeopardise cover for maternity leave but they were waiting for clarity. The Head of Education noted that there were additional and enhanced cleaning costs that would be covered by the grant.

Would PPE be a problem for the Education budget?

- The Head of Education confirmed that they had spoken to schools and asked for their plans for their surplus, many schools had described an unstable position as the budget might have been used for PPE costs.

Would teacher's pay rises would be dealt with by individual schools or the authority as a whole?

- The Head of Education informed committee that they would not be dealt with immediately as they are not determined until September. The Head of Education noted that they could honour pay increases for teachers but that it wouldn't get passed on until September. The Head of Education informed committee that when schools were forecasting spending for the next year, they could factor in no additional cost for teachers pay rises.
- The Head of Education highlighted that cost pressures of schools being met as well as Cabinet proposing that new demands for schools will be met. The Head of Education noted that there was £888,000 put into Education Services budget to support free school meals take up, that proposals discussed £1.2m of new funding for supporting ALN learner's needs and an investment into Educational Officers to support schools directly.

Was funding was put into breakfast clubs?

- The Head of Education informed committee that Welsh Government originally provided the Local Authority with grant funding because there is an entitlement for primary school age children to receive free breakfast, but that fell under the Revenue Support Grant, so was difficult to determine whether it was covered by that grant or was council budgeted.

SOCIAL SERVICES

The Strategic Director for Social Services informed committee that it had been the first year in her experience that the service area was not struggling to find money. The Strategic Director highlighted that there had been some additional funding for children in care with ALN. The Strategic Director highlighted the welcome development of the safeguarding hub, which there would be a consistent daily education presence in the hub for referrals from schools. The Strategic Director noted the large rise in referrals seen come through the safeguarding hub. The Strategic Director welcomed the real living wage and the translation of this into the contracts they have with providers was important. The Strategic Director felt that it did not address all issues faced by the industry, but was at least some recognition for staff. The Strategic Director felt that they were in a good position but had some challenges going forward in addressing some consequences of the pandemic. The Strategic Director highlighted the significant underspend in both areas, which presented as such due to the grant funding distorting actual figures, as well as through vacancies freeing up funds and care packages being unable to be offered. The Strategic Director informed committee that they were looking at how to work through given that grants will end, but the needs that they have in terms of hardship will continue.

What progress could be made regarding vacancies?

- The Strategic Director noted that retention and recruitment of staff in all areas of Social Services were a concern and that sickness had had a real impact in service delivery. The Strategic Director highlighted that there was work being done with colleagues to address this as well as having a good social media presence with vacancies which has driven results. The Strategic Director highlighted the social work assistance training to be offered, as well as the work being done with the health board to recruit occupational therapists and assured committee that these were all not Newport only issues but were a concern nationally. The Strategic Director informed committee that they would be looking at the terms and conditions and salary for posts to make a real attempt to entice people into a career in care.
- The Strategic Director highlighted that there were systemic issues in this regard, and while they were not affected as badly as some, there was a need to constantly address issues arising.

An update was requested on adult services.

- The Strategic Director noted that there had been almost 2 years of real issues within Newport and out of authority placements and would be an ongoing issue. The Strategic Director noted that they still had homes in incident, that all staff tested daily for Covid-19 and that the majority of staff were double vaccinated and boosted.
- The Strategic Director noted that there were fewer residents in homes with some having some left and some unfortunately having passed away, as well as not being able to take in new residents for some time if Covid was present into a home, and with admissions from hospitals.
- The Strategic Director offered to ask Mary Ryan to provide a formal update on the Parklands home for committee.

Had staff from the Oldbrook residence been moved to other residences?

- The Strategic Director offered to update the member on this separately.

Would Local councils be working together for the South East Wales Adoption Service and how did the Strategic Director see that partnership developing?

- The Strategic Director confirmed that Newport fell under the Gwent consortia, which was managed in Blaenau and staffed in Torfaen. The Strategic Director noted that all five councils in the Gwent consortia paid into the programme, and when it was created, the budget creation was convoluted as the local authorities put all of their existing adoption budgets into it which has now been recognised as unfair. The Strategic Director highlighted that the service had been successful as fewer children were placed for adoption outside of Gwent, and while it was still challenging with some placements, the support offered was fantastic.

How many children had been adopted from the area?

- The Strategic Director confirmed that between 25-40 had been adopted from the area.

Were those leaving hospital to be placed into care being tested in advance of leaving hospital and when they were placed into care?

- The Strategic Director confirmed that they were tested upon leaving the hospital and entering the home.

What was the process for older children being adopted?

- The Strategic Director informed committee that it was more challenging with older children and generally did not seek adoption for children over the age of 5, with long term fostering being more common.

Was the day care in Malpas to be closed?

- The Strategic Director confirmed it had been closed at the beginning of the pandemic to protect the health of those who attended as they were particularly vulnerable.
- The Strategic Director highlighted that they were looking at more tailored options for individuals which had been accelerated by the pandemic, but focused on community based activities and supporting in finding what is right for the individual and for doing different things.

Had the pandemic seen a rise in children being removed from home?

- The Strategic Director informed committee that the impact on families had been significant for some families and there had been a big uplift in referrals.

What were the challenges for the time period from 2022-23 to 2024-25?

- The Strategic Director noted that challenges included how they would pay the new living wage and what that would look like and "getting it right" with Domiciliary care provision and improving the care and services across the board for adults. The Strategic Director highlighted challenges in Children's services continued to be placements and their work towards the government programme to eliminate profit in children's social care. The Strategic Director felt that the overarching challenge would be tying together all areas and improving them together, as well as staffing continuing to be an issue.

It was noted that there seemed to be a policy of "spend now to save later" and asked whether there were any potential plans for the future.

- The Strategic Director highlighted the work being done for children with ALN, data being revealed that there had been a 48% reduction in new-borns being removed from families, the Baby and Me seminar that would be running for members, and that they were launching a Child Exploitation Strategy.
- The Strategic Director informed committee of the work being done for tech and digital solutions for older people and felt there was a real scope for future work in this area.

A committee member asked whether there were PPE reserves or funding for staff.

- The Strategic Director noted that the Hardship Grants were coming to an end which was an issue, and that they would have to continue to monitor the situation.

A committee member asked whether the National Care Service would be similar to the fostering service online.

- The Strategic Director noted that this initiative was still somewhat off, and the immediate areas within the programme that would change were free school meals, the elimination of profit in children's social care. The Strategic Director noted that the main focus both regionally and nationally was on budget settlements for next year and how to drive programmes forward.

A committee member commented that the only real way to thank staff is through their wage packet.

Was there evidence that there was need for another high school?

- The Head of Education assured committee that they would continue to monitor this, but there was currently a surge of primary to secondary children, and would have to reassess if there were any long term issues. The Head of Education confirmed that there were still surplus places in Llanwern and other schools.

Was there more demand for Welsh-medium school places?

- The Head of Education confirmed that demand is increasing.

A committee member asked for clarity on the change of cost for meal income.

- The Strategic Director informed committee that these were under discussion and an answer would be brought back.
- The Strategic Director clarified that it was for visitors to establishments.

Why had legal charges had gone up 100% for residents?

- The Senior Finance Business Partner noted that it was deemed that the previous legal charge was insufficient to cover costs that legal incur and the figure had been suggested by legal as a proposal. The Senior Finance Business Partner noted that it was not about an increase but a true reflection of cost.

5. Conclusion of Committee Reports

, People Committee – 25.01.2022 – Comments and Recommendations

Budget

Education

- Questions were raised as to whether the Council are certain that the RSG grants will cover the free school meals initiative in future – throughout the school year and holidays. Some Councillors queried whether NCC would be expected to cover the cost in future.
- Is there any need for another high school in the medium term and if so, is that accounted for in funding?

Social Services

- How will the rise in living wage and real living wage effect the Social Services budget and has this been costed?
- Clarity was requested on meal income reducing to 0 and legal charges doubling (page 53 on the report) – are both of these changes essential and how will they effect the budget overall?

6. Scrutiny Advisor Reports

7. Date of the Next Meeting

22nd March 2022