

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

FINANCE & PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the Special Meeting of the Finance & Performance Scrutiny Committee held at the County Borough Council Offices, The Pavilions, Cambrian Park, Clydach Vale on Wednesday, 9th December, 2015 at 5 p.m.

PRESENT

County Borough Councillor M.A.Norris – in the Chair

County Borough Councillors

S.Evans	P.Wasley
P.Griffiths	E.Webster
G.Smith	C.J.Willis
(Mrs.)J.S.Ward	R.Yeo

In Attendance:

County Borough Councillors: P.Jarman and M.J.Watts (Vice-Chair of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee)

Mr.R.Hull – Chair of Audit Committee

Education Co-opted Members: Mr.J.Fish (Elected Parent/Governor Representative) and Mr.C.Jones (representing GMB)

Officers in Attendance:

Mr.C.Lee – Group Director, Corporate & Frontline Services
Mr.A.Wilkins – Head of Legal, Democratic & Corporate
Mr.R.Waters – Service Director, Highways & Streetcare
Ms.A.Batley – Service Director, Children’s Services
Mrs.G.Davies – Service Director, Access, Engagement & Inclusion
Ms.W.Edwards – Head of Community Learning
Ms.M.Mereidith – Officer in Charge (Children’s Residential Homes)
Mr.D.James – Youth Engagement & Participation Services Manager
Ms.K.May – Head of Democratic Services

34 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from County Borough Councillors (Mrs.)J.Bonetto, S.Bradwick, G.R.Davis, (Mrs.)S.Jones, (Mrs.)C.Leyshon, (Mrs.)S.Rees and R.W.Smith. Apologies for absence were also received from Mr.J.Horton and Mr.M.Cleverley – Education Co-opted Members.

35 DECLARATION OF INTEREST

In accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct, County Borough Councillor P.Wasley declared a personal interest in respect of Agenda Item 2 - proposed service change proposals – "I am a grandparent of a child that attends Tonyrefail Nursery and I am also a Board member of the Communities First Cluster in Tonyrefail, which is mentioned in the consultation documents".

36 MEDIUM TERM SERVICE PLANNING – CONSULTATION ON THE PROPOSED SERVICE CHANGE PROPOSALS IN RELATION TO:

1. The Library Service
2. Youth Engagement
3. Supported Bus Routes
4. Day Nurseries

The Head of Legal, Democratic & Corporate provided the Committee with an overview of the process explaining that it was not the purpose of the meeting to scrutinise the proposals but to act as a consultee in relation to the recent decision of the Cabinet to initiate an eight week consultation exercise in respect of the four services listed above. As part of the engagement strategy employed, all non-executive Members and co-opted Members through the conduit of the Finance and Performance Scrutiny Committee were given the opportunity to provide any feedback on the proposals as outlined in the report that was presented to Cabinet on the 10th November, 2015.

The Group Director, Corporate & Frontline Services indicated that the consultation period runs from the 23rd November, 2015 to the 18th January, 2016 and a variety of methods was being used during the consultation exercise e.g. questionnaires, booklets, engagement events and various groups including non-executive Members and co-opted Members at this special meeting. He stated that the lead Officers for each of the specific proposed areas were present to answer any questions.

The Chair informed Members that each of the proposed service areas would be dealt with separately and as listed above and that the views from this meeting would be noted and fed back to the Cabinet as part of the consultation process.

The Library Service

With the permission of the Chairman, Councillor Jarman conveyed the concerns on behalf of Councillor K.Morgan in respect of the proposal for Hirwaun Library to become a single branch as it is a multi-use facility offering a full range of activities for residents, for example, reading groups, yoga, craft groups etc. and it also works with other organisations such as Learn Direct. Through investment the building has also been refurbished. By reducing the staffing levels would make it difficult for the range of activities to continue.

Councillor Jarman then expressed her own views in respect of the proposals for the library service and referred to the link to the reports that were to be considered at the meeting of the Cabinet on Tuesday, 15th December, 2015 which had been emailed to all elected Members, one such report was in respect of the proposal to relocate the services delivered in Porth library to Porth Plaza, she felt that this was untimely in light of the current proposals that were being consulted upon and also undermined the Scrutiny process.

She also queried the safety of staff and cover arrangements during times of sickness/absence and also when staff are taking breaks during the day when employed in a single staffed branch library. Further, who would take the decision on which magazines/newspapers were to be removed from each of the libraries.

The representative of the GMB indicated that the discussions, held to date, with their members, indicated that staff were concerned over the health and safety issues of `lone working` and these will be included, along with other issues in the Union's submission.

The Head of Community Learning responded to the comments made in respect of single staff branches and indicated that up until 2014, Hirwaun was a single staffed library, it was intended that volunteers could be used for such activities as Mother and Toddler Groups. During this consultation exercise, the concerns expressed by Members had been shared by others in respect of the safety of the single staffed branches and if such a proposal was to be approved by the Cabinet then measures would be put in place whereby the staff would be allocated `care line pendants` and it was also likely that CCTV could be installed, the funding of which comes from another source and therefore cannot be used for additional staff. A general risk assessment had been undertaken but should the proposal proceed then a specific site assessment for each of the areas and individual risk assessments of staff who would potentially be affected by lone working would also be undertaken.

In respect of the proposal to reduce expenditure on the purchase of magazines and newspapers, the Head of Community Learning, informed Members that, if agreed, then the communities would be consulted on which publications are to be removed as a blanket decision could not be made for the libraries as a whole. However, the Council is obliged to retain a copy of each of the local newspapers.

One Member reported that he saw the merit in the proposal for five libraries to be single staffed branches as the alternative could be to have fewer libraries. However, there was no reference in the documents *to corollary between professional librarians and volunteers as a practical support mechanism*.

In response, the Head of Community Learning stated that the service previously employed nine Senior Officers and now there were three, however, there was flexibility with the new system of working which was introduced as a result of the last Service change through use of Library Assistants based at Area Libraries to provide cover, nonetheless should there be a spate of

sickness/absence across a number of libraries then a library would have to be closed during that period.

A Member referred to page 17 of the consultation document in respect of "Area & Branch Library Data", and he queried was the information accurate in respect of PC usage as there were 8 PCs positioned within the library located within his ward and not all 8 were used at one given time, therefore, if the PCs were to be reduced in number would this result in an increase in average use?

The Head of Community Learning informed the Member that the percentage usage of PCs in a library are considered as a whole, the other libraries within RCT have 12 to 14 PCs, which effectively put them at a disadvantage in comparison to libraries with fewer PCs as the usage of each PC is the performance indicator for the data.

Youth Engagement and Participation Service

In response to comments made in respect of the reduction of enrichment budgets to mainstream schools by 10% and the difference in levels of activities as outlined on page 22 of the consultation document, the Youth Engagement & Participation Services Manager stated the enrichment budget replaced the E3 budget and that the activities range from school to school as there were different levels of funding allocated to each school.

The co-opted Member commented on the cost of the consultation process and he hoped that, in the future, the level of the enrichment budget funding for mainstream schools would not be reduced further, resulting in a further consultation exercise.

A Member voiced his concern that the proposal to reduce the number of core funded YEPS staff per cluster could result in insufficient supervision for the youths.

The Youth Engagement & Participation Services Manager reported that in addition to the proposal to reduce the number of YEPS staff, the service employees 17 part time staff who are to be retained and he gave assurances that there would be one member of staff for every 15 young people.

Supported Bus Routes

A Member expressed her concern on the proposal of the Council ceasing to support route 25 – Fernhill – Cefnpennar – Ynysybwl – Pontypridd as the withdrawal of this service would isolate many individuals and queried the overall mileage of a single journey.

The Service Director, Highways & Streetcare reported that from an impact assessment perspective, the route in question came bottom of the 18 routes and on that basis, its route and vehicle efficiency was negated by its low use.

With regards to the overall mileage of the journey, he would provide the information to the Member concerned following the meeting.

A Member voiced his concern on the proposal to cease to support route 153 – Tonypany – Gilfach Goch as this service was used by `shift workers` and could undermine the work that has been undertaken in this Communities First area in getting people to work.

The Service Director, Highways & Streetcare reported that this service runs three journeys a day which wraps around a commercial service from 6.25 a.m. to 6.26 p.m. with approximately 3 passengers per journey thereby subsidising 3,000 passengers a year. It was also one of the three lowest scoring routes on the service impact assessment.

Day Nurseries

Members expressed concern that there should be freedom of flexibility in the nurseries that offer Flying Start places as there would not be a capacity issue, if the places could be offered to children outside the Flying Start area, especially in Aberaman.

The Service Director, Children's Services reported that this was out of the control of the Council as Flying Start is funding by Welsh Government, however, the areas are frequently reviewed and comments therefrom referred to Welsh Government.

In response to a query raised in respect of the expenditure in Tylorstown compared to Tonyrefail, when it was reported that Tonyrefail nursery is based in a school, whereas Tylorstown is not and therefore more expensive.

In conclusion, the Chairman thanked everyone for their attendance and comments which would be fed back to the Cabinet.

**M.A.NORRIS
CHAIRMAN**

The meeting closed at 4.25 p.m.

