



Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Board

Friday, 13 January 2012 (AM)

-: Present :-

Councillor Thomas (J) (Chairman)

Councillors Barnby, Bent, Butt, Darling (Vice-Chair), Kingscote, Parrott, Pentney and Pountney

(Also in attendance: Councillors Lewis, Ellery, Cowell, Brooksbank, Davies, Baldrey, Morey, James, Doggett, Thomas (D) and Tyerman)

466 Apologies

An apology for absence was received from Penny Burnside (Co-optee).

466.1 Setting the context - Budget 2012/13

The Executive Head of Finance gave a brief presentation to the Board outlining the 2012/13 Budget. The Board heard the context of the 2012/2012 Budget and heard how the Comprehensive Spending Review (2010) carried a headline of 28% reduction in funding, which is an £11m budget gap for the Authority in 2012/13. The Governments autumn statement highlighted ongoing savings were essential throughout the coming financial years 2013/ 2014 and 2014/ 2015 and that the Board should take this into consideration when making decisions and suggested that the Board may wish to put forward alternatives if they do not agree with the savings proposed.

The Executive Head reminded the Board that the elected Mayor announced provisional spending targets at Full Council on 8 December 2011 which outlined the proposed net budget of £122m. Services across the Authority have worked to identify savings (consisting of a mixture of efficiency savings, income generation opportunities and cuts) required to meet the target. The Council's has carried out public budget consultation which started in September 2011.

The Board were advised that the final settlement is to be confirmed at the end of January by Central Government. With the final Budget Proposals presented to Full Council in February.

The Board questioned how inflation had been applied through the budget setting process and were advised by the Executive Head of Finance that Inflation was kept high on items such as gas, electricity and fuel and kept low on items such as stationary. The Board were advised a further £500,000 of funding could be lost in relation to Academy Schools, but this was subject to confirmation from Government which is expected in the next few weeks.

The Board raised concerns around whether the right level of paperwork had been issued in preparation for the scrutiny of the budget proposals 2012/2013. The Board were advised that much of the information relating to business units, business plans and their targets are available on the performance management system SPAR- which all councillors have access to and that the information available on this system may assist with the scrutiny of the budget proposals. The Board were advised that the amount of paperwork issued for the process of scrutinising the budget proposals had attempted to be reduced, without hindering the process, with a view of looking to keep print and paper costs to a minimum.

The Board discussed the potential benefit of budget building and planning over a number of years rather than the current approach which concentrates on one year at a time.

Resolved:

- 1) The current one year approach to budget building and planning for future financial years was discussed - recommending that the Councils give consideration to using 3 or even 4 year Business Plans, to include strategic and operational information.
- 2) That for future Overview & Scrutiny meetings consideration should be given that more financial information should be provided, including business plans (where available).

The Board requested details of how many Councillors can access the system SPAR and whether usage figures could also be made available to the Board. This information will be provided.

467 Children, School and Families

The Executive Lead for Children's, Schools and Families introduced the first agenda item, Children, Schools and Families, and thanked the director of Children's Services and the wider Children's Services team for their hard work. Councillor Lewis explained that Children's Services faced a complex and difficult portfolio of work following a negative inspection and high profile national cases such as 'Baby P'. The recent "Children's Service Improvement Plan" is being embedded within Children's Services and this has included a restructure with strong emphasis being placed on Early Intervention & Safeguarding. The Board that around 290 children are currently on child protection plans and that Children's Services has a predicted overspend of around £1.9 million this year. The Board were advised that this is a historical over spend and that an additional figure of £1 million has been built into the base budget. The Board heard how savings identified in Children's Services tried to focus on 'doing things differently' without cutting front line service, with the emphasis on putting money into providing services for the most vulnerable children in the Bay.

The Board questioned whether the savings required from 1st April 2012 can be achieved. The Board were advised by the Director of Children's Services that he was confident that the savings could be achieved and that the departments within

Children's Services will be working in different ways, and in partnership with others now that the restructure has taken place. The Board were advised that the new "Parkfield" building in Paignton will help to generate income and that a business plan is currently being prepared.

In response to questioning the Board were advised that budget had been built around the number of children looked after, which currently stands at 251 although the Board were advised of the difficulties of mapping this figure and not knowing just exactly how many children will need care, as the number will change throughout the year. The Director of Children's Services acknowledged previous promises made to the Board in relation the Children's Services budget and added that the budget this year is more realistic. He continued to add that similar challenges are likely to be faced in the next financial year (2013/2014).

The Board questioned whether there are any implementation costs associated with the proposals as there are none outlined in the budget papers. The Board were advised that the only additional costs not shown related to redundancy costs, which are usually costed centrally.

The Board were advised that an additional £75k funding to be used to work with troubled families would shortly be made available to the Council, and that this was not recorded in the budget information provided as is a brand new funding stream, and therefore an additional £75k.

The Board asked: In relation to Youth Service savings how will the grant for community and voluntary sector groups be administered and are there any cost the council of administering this? The Board were advised that the Youth Service is speaking to the local community, as in some cases the voluntary sector may be better placed to provide some services. The Board were advised that full consultation will take place at the end of January 2012 on this. The Board heard about an example relating to Play Services Torbay where a different approach to working has proved to be a success.

The Board questioned how long it might be until the changes identified within the improvement programme can start to be seen. The Board heard how each change is different and some vary in timescale, some take years some only weeks but real changes should be noticed by 2 years.

The Board were advised that Children's Services are working in partnership with local Schools, Public Health and School Nurses in relation to Teenage Pregnancy.

The Board questioned when the proposed reduction in Attendance Improvement Officers would take place. The Board were advised that the reduction would not take place until the Director of Children's Services could be ensured that there would be no negative impact.

The Board asked: whether it was the right time to be making reductions to the grants for "Connexions" and the "Children's Society". The Board were advised that a review of the contracts is being carried out with a view of sliming the four separate

contracts into one, the tender process for which will soon commence with a view of the contract being delivered next year.

The Board heard how there is a moderate overspend this financial year within Children's Services, and also how the budget within Children's Services has been difficult to deliver historically. The Director of Children's Services advised the Board that he is confident that within the next few years the service will be delivered within budget.

The Board questioned the levels of child poverty recently reported to be around 22% within Torbay. The Board heard how child poverty is linked in with a number of other issues such as a weak economy and worklessness. The Board were reminded how the mayor's pledges include health, happiness and prosperity and heard how a stronger economy could reduce child poverty levels. The Board were advised of a draft Poverty Strategy which will soon go out for consultation. In response to questioning the Board were advised that eradicating child poverty did not sit with children's services, it is an issue which requires work across the Council and with partners.

The Board heard how Children's Services are compiling draft business plans which will look at 2-3 year periods.

In response to questioning around Schools and Academies the Board were reminded by the Director of Children's Services of the Council's mandate to maintain quality of education. In response to questioning the Board heard how the 'schools supporting schools' service is made up of a mixture of local Schools and Academies. The Board heard how those schools who had converted to academy status had made clear intention to continue working closely with the Authority.

In response to questioning the Board heard how children's services are reviewing ways of working which includes looking at process reconfiguration. The Board heard how this has included a review of contracts (for services) which found some areas of duplication in work. The Board were assured that new ways of working would address this and therefore would have a positive outcome for the service users and clients.

In response to questioning the Board were advised that the Director of Children's services was "moderately confident" in achieving the budget within the next two years.

Resolved:

- 1) That the funding of £100,000 for the Early Years Service is not cut.
- 2) To ensure that the Strategic Lead post for teenage pregnancies remains until the Board are satisfied that there is no adverse impact on the work currently being carried out in this area.

- 3) To ensure that the reduction in Attendance Improvement Officers does not take place until the Board can be assured that “The Schools Supporting Schools Programme” is in place and the removal of these posts will not have a negative impact.