

Public Document Pack

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

**Minutes of the meeting of Adults Select Committee held
at Council Chamber, County Hall, The Rhadyr, Usk, NP15 1GA on Tuesday, 24th
January, 2017 at 10.00 am**

PRESENT: County Councillor P. Farley (Chairman)
County Councillor R. Harris (Vice Chairman)

County Councillors: R. Chapman, R. Edwards, M. Hickman,
P. Jones, P. Jordan, A. Wintle, D Hill, D Hudson and V. Smith

Also in attendance County Councillor(s): P. Hobson, P. Murphy and
V. Smith

ALSO PRESENT

D. Hudson, Co-Opted Member
D. Hill, Co-Opted Member

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Julie Boothroyd	Head of Adult Services
Wendy Barnard	Democratic Services Officer
Tyrone Stokes	Accountant
Hazel Ilett	Scrutiny Manager
Mark Howcroft	Assistant Head of Finance
Ian Bakewell	Housing and Communities Officer
Andy McMahon	Housing Grants Surveyor

APOLOGIES:

Councillors P. Watts and County Councillor G. Burrows, Cabinet Member, Social Care, Safeguarding and Health

1. Declarations of interest

County Councillor A. Wintle declared a personal, non-prejudicial interest in relation to items 4 and 5 as a board member of Monmouthshire Housing Association.

2. To confirm the minutes of the following meetings:

3. Joint Adults Select and Children and Young People's Select Committee - 22nd November 2016

The minutes of the Joint Adults Select and Children and Young People's Select Committee meeting held on 22nd November 2016 were confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

4. Special Adults Select Committee - 29th November 2016

The minutes of the Special meeting of Adults Select Committee held on 29th November 2016 were confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

5. Adults Select Committee - 13 December 2016

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The minutes of the meeting held on the 13th December 2016 were confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

6. Discussion on Discretionary Housing Payment Recommendations

Context:

County Councillor P. Hobson, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Housing, attended the meeting in response to a letter sent by the Chair containing recommendations to Cabinet following the Committee's pre-decision scrutiny of the Discretionary Housing Payments Policy as part of its wider scrutiny of welfare reform.

Recommendations:

1. Cabinet are recommended to give serious consideration to agreeing an uplift to the monies it invests in the Discretionary Housing Payment fund, recognising the demonstrative impact the funding has had on vulnerable people and the risks and implications of not supporting people through further benefit reductions, particularly in terms of preventing homelessness and children being taken into the care of the Council.
2. Given that much of this work is delivered in a household environment, Cabinet are recommended to recognise the need for an accessible corporate warning system to identify clients and households that may present a risk to lone workers. The Committee understands that Torfaen operates a similar model to protect its workforce.
3. The Committee recommends that all the agencies working in the benefits arena such as the CAB, RSL's and the Council consider the potential for sharing best practice and explore opportunities to create efficiencies and economies in the provision of welfare advisory services.
4. The Committee further recommends a joint meeting with the Planning Committee to consider the relationship between homelessness, housing benefits and the provision of affordable housing in Monmouthshire.

Responses to recommendations by the Cabinet Member

1. The Cabinet considered the recommendation and is not minded to increase Discretionary Housing Payment budget at this time. It is forecast that demands on the budget will not be exceeded and that consequently needs and demands are being met. In terms of the impact and risk of not supporting people, it was commented that the DHP has assisted stability in households otherwise under threat. It was added that welfare policy and benefit change is the responsibility of Central Government; local authorities address the effects of the changes and Cabinet monitors the demand on the DHP budget as changes occur.

The Housing and Communities Officer explained that the support DHP provides for affordability reasons is significant in Monmouthshire according to feedback from all agencies. It was agreed to receive more detailed and frequent monitoring reports to provide clearer information for the Committee. It was added that more pressure on the budget could be anticipated next year as the regulation changes progress (Benefit Cap – lower threshold and changes to Housing Benefit regulations for single people, under 35, in social housing).

2. With regard to question of staff members working in a potentially hazardous environment (households), it was advised that it is hoped to introduce an employee warning database for staff across directorates and elected members later this year. The early warning system in use in Torfaen has been introduced with lots of interest expressed but there is currently a lack of resources to administrate the database. The Corporate Health and

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Safety Group will continue to discuss options and a Violence to Staff sub group will be created to progress the matter. The Health and Safety Manager is also liaising with Careline to see if that system and staff can be utilised. The progress made was welcomed.

3. In relation to perceived duplication, it was commented that this matter will be addressed by the Financial, Economic and Digital Inclusion Partnership (FEDIP) which will review current arrangements to ensure maximisation of resources, avoid duplication and minimise gaps. It was explained that Department for Work and Pensions and Adult Education are key partners. Melin delivers the Universal Credit delivery agreement with Housing Benefit for budgeting and digital support for residents. Monmouthshire supports Registered Social Landlords (RSL) and Housing Associations with regard to trying to prevent evictions. If two consecutive payments are missed, a housing association or RSL will refer to Monmouthshire's financial inclusion officer. Evidence of cross agency collaboration was provided: Melin staff work from Citizens Advice Bureau twice a week. Charter Housing Association are due to start a shared housing development shortly. Monmouthshire Housing Association have a pilot scheme in progress.
4. It was confirmed that a joint meeting with planning meeting has been arranged on 14th February to consider the relationship between homelessness, housing benefits and the provision of affordable housing. Some confusion was acknowledged in the remits of Select Committees in relation to housing. It is recognised that affordability will be a pressure to address as there is an increasingly aging population, and a need to keep young people in the area to retain a balanced population. The difficulties of the largest "middle" sector who earn too much to be allocated social housing, and not enough for a mortgage was discussed, and also the high cost to privately rent.

It was explained that Monmouthshire CC has private landlord leasing arrangements that contribute towards combatting homelessness.

Members Scrutiny

A Member asked a question regarding homelessness figures and it was confirmed that the trend is stable. There is a consistent stream of rehousing needs and B & B placements have risen slightly.

A Member commented that the Local Development Plan (LDP) has an allocation of 35% affordable housing yet developers are reducing this 30% or below and for an adequate amount of social housing to be available, and the Planning Department needs to be firmer.

It was queried if figures for the shortfall of affordable housing in Monmouthshire were available and responded that there is a LDP target of 96 homes per year and if achieved would meet requirements. The current level of need and demand was explained.

The Cabinet Member clarified that for affordable accommodation, there is an aspirational 35% / 25% split (can be up to 60%) and these figures should be communicated to the developer from the outset as a starting point then will be negotiated according to factors such as site and location. It was contested that the developers know their capital costs and cost of unit, and will budget on the purchase cost of land and build in viability accordingly.

Clarification was provided that Monmouthshire County Council does not build council houses adding that there are allocations in the LDP that will satisfy that need mainly via developers and

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sometimes Housing Associations that build social housing. If the developers don't proceed with a site, or there are delays in the process, the target may be delayed. Recently, significant sites in the county have proceeded and will increase the availability of affordable units accordingly. It was also commented that, if a developer does not fulfil the affordability quota, it is robustly challenged by the Council.

A Committee Member expressed concern regarding the difficulties encountered in moving people from hospital and queried if there was insufficient social housing available. It was responded that social housing can be an option for people leaving hospital and often there is an aspiration for ground floor or adaptable accommodation of which there is insufficient stock. It was added that there is an ongoing process each year to identify need and circumstances, increasingly working with Social Services colleagues and the information is factored into the affordable housing development programme. There is limited development of disabled accommodation. Housing Associations continually look to increase, redesignate and refurbish their stock to maximise options.

In answer to a query, it was estimated that that 4000 units of social housing to rent are needed and approximately 8000 affordable to buy properties but, as affordable options increase, it is predicted that demand will rise. The example of the Loftus development in Newport was provided as a suitable model.

Chair's Comments:

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member for Community Development (Housing) for the helpful replies provided to answer questions and concerns, and to encourage dialogue. The Officer was also thanked for providing support and understanding.

The arrangement of a meeting on 14th February led by Economy and Development Committee was welcomed. Members of all committees were invited to attend.

It was concluded that the Committee was satisfied with the answers given. The remaining issues of interaction between Select Committees, their recommendations and feeding them through to Cabinet were considered. It was suggested that Co-Ordinating Board should address these matters.

7. Capital Funding: Disabled Facilities and Safety at Home Grant

Context:

To provide an update on the capital budget provided to support disabled facilities grants (DFGs) and Safety at Home (SAHs) grants and the impact on overall service performance and on services provided by Social Care and Health.

Key Issues:

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1. The Council has a statutory duty to provide DFG's within six months of receiving a valid application. Failure to do so lays it open to legal challenge. It also has discretion to provide SAHs. Since 2006 a capital budget of £600,000 has been provided annually to deliver both types of grants. In broad terms the budget is split into £500,000 to support DFGs and £100,000 to support SAHs.
2. All DFGs are capped at £36,000 and while the majority are in the region of £4,500, each year a number of large, complex grants are provided to meet the needs of children with complex disabilities, and increasingly for adults who are disabled as a result of trauma or degenerative diseases. It is known through client feedback that adaptations have a significant impact on the quality of life of both applicants and carers. Also, customer satisfaction scores of 95% are regularly being achieved.
3. SAHs are intended for smaller works such as handrails, half steps and minor alterations, often costing less than £250 but which make a dwelling safer for a disabled resident. They are often commissioned to facilitate hospital discharge, or to reduce the risk of falls and injuries which might necessitate hospitalisation. Both grants play a key role in facilitating hospital discharge and preventing admission.
4. In addition to the impact upon clients who have to wait longer for adaptations to be carried out, the annual shortage of funds and ever earlier full commitment (typically in the Autumn) has adverse effects on performance in respect of DFGs which is a KPI that is monitored closely by Welsh Government and other stakeholders.
5. Alternatives to DFGs and SAHs do exist though none are as attractive as grant aid. Nevertheless some potential applicants do opt to proceed with the necessary works at their own cost. Please see Appendix 1 for other options available.

Member Scrutiny:

It was noted that the current allocation of £600,000 is insufficient to meet annual demand and the budget is usually committed before Christmas. An estimate was provided that the budget is £500,000 short to address the backlog. At the beginning of January there were 19 applicants waiting for DFG now increased to 44 today, with two months of the financial year to complete. Up to 70 referrals could be received by the end of the financial year but the demand is unknown. The majority of adaptations are due to the aging population in terms of wet/shower rooms, stair lifts and ramping but increasingly more complex adaptations to enable release from hospital.

Financial context was provided that the capital programme has been reviewed with consideration given to changing priorities subject to two important principles; it must be self-financing or alternatively must replace something as a bigger priority as resources are scarce. It was reported that £30,000 has been released from Highways and Access for All budgets to provide a small amount of funding to address quality of life demands. Otherwise prioritisation of DFGs will have to be decided but it was explained that there is little headroom in the capital programme. Members were provided with information regarding borrowing.

Following presentation of the report, Members were invited to comment:

It was commented that the authority has an ethos of encouraging independence, but there is insufficient support and it was suggested that the matter should be prioritised. It was queried if the Health Board's budget could be diverted to DFGs to assist in alleviating bed blocking and make a saving but confirmed that this approach has been raised with the Health Board but declined because of the difference between social and health care.

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A member asked if the funding was available, could the remaining demand be reduced. It was responded that demand is largely unknown to do with the aging population and the unpredictable need for varying levels of adaptation or to move to more suitable accommodation.

A Member questioned the numbers of people in hospital awaiting DFG adaptations to enable their return home. It was confirmed that numbers were not immediately available but that referrals were made via hospital occupational therapists.

In response to a question, it was explained that there is collaborative working in the Gwent wide "In One Place" project with Social Care, Registered Social Landlords and local authorities to make joint proposals to develop housing solutions that benefit Health on a higher strategic level. One such development has been delivered with Monmouthshire Housing (Skenfrith House, Abergavenny) and there is scope for future similar plans.

Members revisited the issue of the difficulties in moving people out of hospital to social housing, and were informed that often Health Services will not release a patient until the necessary work is carried out.

The speed of completion of works was discussed and it was confirmed that delays are related to the complexity of the work required and lack of funding.

Recommendations

1. The Committee considered how the disabled adaptation programme is supporting residents to remain living safely and independently at home and recommended that the identified underspend is used to reduce the backlog of adaptations required.
2. The Committee recommends to Cabinet an increase in capital funding for disabled adaptation grants in 2017/18 and subsequent years.

Chairs Comments

The Chair expressed gratitude for the clear and helpful report referring to issues that have not been resolved over many years. He commented that the recommendation to utilise an identified underspend represented a short term way forward to reduce the backlog of adaptations needed.

Encouragement was given to Cabinet to actively consider an increase in capital funding for disabled adaptation grants in 2017/18 and subsequent years.

8. Draft Capital Budget Proposals 2017/18 to 2020/21

Context:

To scrutinise the proposed capital budget for 2017/18 and the indicative capital budgets for the three years 2018/19 to 2020/21.

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Key Issues:

Capital Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) issues:

- The four year capital programme is reviewed annually and updated to take account of any new information that is relevant.
- The major component of the capital MTFP for the next few years is the Future Schools Programme. The Council has recently approved further funding for this programme at its meeting on the 20th October 2016.
- There are a number of other areas where there is a commitment to invest. However, the schemes currently sit outside the programme as work progresses to identify the funding requirements. These are:
 - Monmouth Pool – commitment to re-provide the pool in Monmouth as a consequence of the Future Schools Programme.
 - Abergavenny Hub – commitment to re-provide the library with the One Stop Shop in Abergavenny to conclude the creation of a Hub in each of the towns.
 - Disabled Facilities Grants – the demand for grants is currently outstripping the budget. Work is being undertaken to assess the level of investment required to maximize the impact and benefit for recipients.
 - City Deal - 10 Authorities in the Cardiff City region are looking at a potential £1.2 billion City Deal. Agreement to commit to this programme is being sought across the region in January 2017 and so would impact on the capital MTFP. The potential impact on individual authority budgets is currently being modelled in advance of decisions on specific projects and profiles in order for authorities to start reflecting the commitment in their MTFPs.
 - J and E Block – the office rationalization programme is being considered to see if there is a solution that would enable the Magor and Usk sites to be consolidated, releasing funding to pay for the necessary investment to bring the blocks into use.
- A strategy that enables the core programme, Future Schools and the above schemes to be accommodated is being developed. Notwithstanding this, there will still remain a considerable number of pressures that sit outside of any potential to fund them within the Capital MTFP and this has significant risk associated with it. Cabinet has previously accepted this risk.
- The current policy is that further new schemes can only be added to the programme if the business case demonstrates that they are self-financing or the scheme is deemed a higher priority than current schemes in the programme and therefore displaces it.

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- In summary, the following other issues and pressures have been identified:
 - Long list of back log pressures – infrastructure, property, DDA work, Public rights of way, as outlined in Appendix 1 of the report. None of these pressures are included in the current capital MTFP, but this carries with it a considerable risk.
 - Capital investment required to deliver revenue savings – this is principally in the area of office accommodation and looking at alternative delivery models for leisure and culture, social care, property investment and possibly Additional Learning Needs. The level of investment is currently being assessed. However, in accordance with the principle already established, if the schemes are not going to displace anything already in the programme then the cost of any additional borrowing will need to be netted off the saving to be made.
 - The IT reserve is depleted so funding for any major new IT investment is limited. Any additional IT schemes will need to either be able to pay for themselves or displace other schemes in the programme.
 - Circuit of Wales – the Authority has undertaken due diligence work on a version of the proposal which concluded not to proceed, the current proposal is being considered by Welsh Government without recourse to Local Authority funding.

Members' attention was drawn to the information that Adults Select has had the least funding of all the Select Committees for capital in past years that has focussed on property maintenance schemes affecting social care establishments and the Mardy Park refurbishment, noting that most of the work has not have been core funded, but ICF funded from Welsh Government initiatives.

In terms of Capital budgeting, the Council faces a reducing resource base that affects the capacity for supported borrowing.

It was commented that DFG grants have been maintained at the previous level and the focus is mainly on the Future schools programme and the rebuilt of two secondary schools. It was noted that previously, it has been possible to utilise underspends in the County Farms budget, however there is a backlog of farm maintenance which now limits flexibility.

It was confirmed that the programme contains £1m prudential borrowing per annum which is proposed to be maintained.

Members' attention was drawn to para 3.4, in the context of the pressures identified in Appendix 1 and 3.7, which mentions the potential replacement of Severnview and an uplift in DFG funding.

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As highlighted in the report, some work, as listed, will need continued funding but that £500,000 headroom has been included to progress the work through a mixture of the short term borrowing strategy and the MRP calculations.

It was explained that the Capital Budget will be set by council at the end of February and there will be opportunities to comment on priorities.

Member Scrutiny

A Member queried, and it was confirmed, that there will be a capital receipt for the disposal of the Magor premises but this may be worth less than the cost of the work to refurbish J and E block due to the current property market conditions. It was added that past mandates have presumed a saving from the Magor premises to rationalise our buildings. The Cabinet Member, Resources explained that given the current property market climate, consideration is being given to possibly leasing the building in whole or part noting that the costs of running the Magor premises will be significant in the calculations to refurbish J and E Block.

It was confirmed that the £300,000 listed under County Farm schemes is a capital expenditure cost (not the net cost after receipts) to the authority in term of its maintenance responsibilities as a landlord.

In response to a question, it was confirmed that E Block is in the ownership of the authority currently in use as storage for election equipment.

A Member asked about the ALN service and when any information will be available. It was confirmed by the Cabinet Member, Resources that progress is advanced.

Regarding County Farms, it was queried when rents were last reviewed. It was explained that rents are reviewed on a 3 or 4 year rolling programme and assessed on a commercial basis, adding that the holdings are not of high rentable value. If farms are sold, the sale is on a non-discounted, open market value basis.

The timetable for the proposed replacement of Severnview was queried and it was explained that this proposal for re-provision has been under consideration for a few years. It was suggested that it could be within a 5 year timeframe.

Chairs Comments

The Chair thanked the officers for their contribution to consideration of this item.

9. DRAFT BUDGET PROPOSALS 2017/18 FOR CONSULTATION - Adults Select Committee

Context:

- To provide detailed draft proposals on the budget savings required to meet the gap between available resources and need to spend in 2017/18, for consultation purposes.

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- To consider the 2017/18 budget within the context of the 4 year Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) and the emergence of priorities to guide forward activities through Future Monmouthshire.

Key Issues:

The Select Committee scrutinised the Social Care and Housing Directorate's budget proposals, as outlined in Appendix 3F of the report, which equated to a saving in the sum of £236,024.

Background information was provided by the Assistant Head of Finance that this report concentrates on revenue and running costs distinct from the previous report based on capital budgets. It was clarified that, historically, a mandate process has been applied where officers offer mandates and then deliver upon them. This approach has been revised to challenge service managers to offer suggestions to make e.g. 5% or 10% savings to make services more sustainable. This was undertaken across the directorates and a comprehensive list of proposals was compiled accordingly some viable and some less realistic.

Additional context was provided that a budget problem for next year has been resolved instead of preparing a four year Medium Term Financial Plan to allow some flexibility for the new administration following the local government elections in May 2017.

It was added that funding from Central Government is better than anticipated in recognition of the rurality of the County, however the best outcome remains a standstill (0%) budget despite annual pressures of salary increments, cost of living increases and rising contract inflation etc. Attention was drawn to the report, para 3.2 budget assumptions for the year accordingly. It was pointed out if there were no changes implemented, the result would be £2.5million pressures next year from inflation. Additionally, pressures within services have been considered, e.g. where mandates have not materialised as originally planned and the position revised. Pressures will rise to £4million accordingly. £4million savings have not been made in services in view of MRP proposals to progress paper savings instead. This approach provides £1.5million headroom but it is implicit that saving are still made. It was highlighted that the proposed percentage savings put forward by managers varied. Work on the budget and savings continues.

Members were asked to consider the proposals for saving within Adults remit (Appendix 3f).

The Cabinet Member, Resources, provided clarification that recognition of the county's rurality has allocated additional funding but it has not altered the overall funding position. The County continues to receive the least funding of all Welsh authorities; per capita population has dropped from £1060 to £995.

The Committee was informed that this is the opportunity to offer alternative proposals.

Member Scrutiny

The suggestion, Adult Commissioning (5.2), referring to the termination of room rental in Abergavenny was queried. It was confirmed that the My Day My Life project will not be adversely affected through the amalgamation of arrangements.

Adult Resources (5.1) was queried what was meant by "Restructure finance and benefits advice team to replace 2 posts on lower grades", and if there would be any impact on the quality of the

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service. It was responded that there will be regrading of posts, further details to be confirmed; consultation with unions is still in progress. It was questioned if this was linked to 10.2 “alignment of welfare benefits information, advice and assistance services” and confirmed that there is a link between the two suggestions following a review of welfare rights which identifies a number of welfare advice portals and presents an opportunity for efficiency and a more cohesive approach. It was additionally queried if this was across the council or just within adult social services. It was confirmed that this was the case and there can be duplication including with organisations outside the authority and the opportunity to collaborate.

Regarding Adult Resources (5.3) “Reduce IT Development budget”, it was queried if there would be an adverse impact on delivery of services. It was confirmed that the reduction is challenging but achievable though savings in license agreements.

Adults S406 MCHT (5.2) “explore live in carer rather than hourly cost via care agency” was queried by a Member who asked if this element referred to one service user or several, and if the proposal will go ahead. It was clarified that this element refers to domiciliary care agencies or providers and that the mandate proposal is, for some cases, to change from 24 hour living support to a care agency not about individual cost.

Members reflected on 4 mandate proposals listed under Enterprise Directorate (Appendix 3c) totalling £40,923 and considered that the proposals were anticipated, and aligned to matters previously discussed and supported by the Select Committee.

The Committee was reassured that there were no budget proposals to cut Adult Education. Instead, it was explained that the challenge was to accommodate the lack of franchising in view of reduced courses provided by Coleg Gwent.

The Committee was reminded that there had been a pragmatic approach to the budget setting round this year, preferring to not make significant changes in service areas before a new council administration in May, and also in acknowledgement of this year’s more beneficial financial settlement. It was also predicted that future settlements would be more challenging citing public sector funding in England, and that prioritisation and collaboration will be necessary to sustain services.

Chair’s Comments

The Chair thanked Officers for their contribution to the meeting. He also thanked the Cabinet Member, Resources for his attendance at the meeting.

The Chair acknowledged that the implications of savings were unwelcome but it was hoped to minimise the impact on residents.

The Chair welcomed the encouragement from Officers to consider cross cutting issues and not matters in isolation.

10. Adults Select Committee - Forward Work Plan

An updated version of the Forward Work Plan was received. In doing so the following schedule of meetings was agreed:

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6th February 2017: Joint Children and Young People's Select and Adults Select Committees to scrutinise the Population Needs Assessment.

14th February 2017: Joint Select Economy and Development Select, Strong Communities Select and Adults Select Committees (hosted by one Select Committee, not yet determined) with Planning Committee to scrutinise:

- Supplementary Planning Guidance on affordable housing
- Monmouthshire Letting Service: the proposed approach for accessing private rented sector accommodation to prevent homelessness
- Homeless Prevention – Rent Guarantee Scheme (an element of the Monmouthshire Letting Service)

A Committee Member questioned why Economy and Development Select Committee had taken over responsibility from Strong Communities Select Committee. It was explained that Strong Communities Select Committee is responsible for scrutiny of housing provision, Adults Select Committee's remit is homelessness, welfare reform and affordable housing and Economy and Development has responsibility for developers' affordable housing percentages in the LDP so there are overlapping themes. The joint meeting has been arranged to avoid duplication.

27th February 2017: Special Joint Select Committees to scrutinise the Alternative Delivery Model

28th February 2017: Adults Select Committee

31st January 2017: Joint Select Committees to scrutinise the Budget

The Chair queried the process of what happens after a Select Committee sends a recommendation to Cabinet and noted that Co-Ordinating Board will consider this matter.

11. Cabinet and Council Work Planner

The Cabinet and Council Work Planner was noted.

12. To confirm the date and time of the next meeting as Tuesday 28th February 2017 at 10.00am

The meeting ended at 12.12 pm