

Cutting Our Cloth Task and Finish Group



Final Report

28 February 2017

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Executive Summary

The effects of the global financial crisis of 2007-08 eventually filtered through to local government funding. Between 2011 and 2015 Denbighshire reduced its spending by approximately £20m, mainly through administrative efficiencies without affecting frontline service delivery. Despite this a further £17m worth of savings, had to be made for the period between 2015 and 2017. Inevitably, as administrative costs had already been realised the majority of the £17m worth of additional savings could only be achieved through redesigning services or transferring the delivery of some non-statutory services to other organisations. To facilitate this a comprehensive budget setting process was undertaken, which included the holding of regular budget workshops for all councillors at which non-statutory service areas were examined to see if they could be delivered in an alternative way. This budget process, called 'Freedoms and Flexibilities', was followed by a public consultation called 'Cutting Our Cloth', the purpose of which was to inform residents of the Council's proposals for delivering services in future and seek their views on the proposals.

Soon after the savings proposals were agreed and the budget had been set a decision was taken to commence an evaluation of the impact of achieving those savings on communities in Denbighshire. A Scrutiny Task and Finish Group was established whose objective it was to determine whether the impact of achieving the savings on communities in the county had been as originally assessed during the budget setting process, whether it had been worse than anticipated, or whether any other unforeseen factors had come into play to plug any voids caused by reduced Council funding. Over a 20 month period the 'Cutting Our Cloth' Task and Finish Group held several meetings and examined various pieces of evidence, including residents and service users' views on a range of services which had either seen their funding from the Council reduced or withdrawn. Its detailed report, including its findings in relation to each budget saving examined and final conclusions, is attached.

At the conclusion of its work the Group acknowledges that whilst not all aspects of implementing the savings to services went as planned from outset, it is satisfied that any initial problems experienced were addressed as soon as reasonably possible. Having regard to the scale of the savings which had to be achieved the Group is of the view that in the budget savings it reviewed it could not find evidence of the actual impact on communities being worse than originally anticipated. However, there were a number of examples where the change in service delivery model had actually produced better outcomes for service-users whilst also securing better value for money for the Council.

Based on the evidence reviewed the Group concludes that the thorough process followed for setting the budget for 2015 -16 and 2016 -17 financial years, and the holding of a series of dedicated budget workshops for members, was a prudent and effective method and one it recommends should be used for future budget setting processes.

Full report of the Cutting Our Cloth Task and Finish Group

Background

During 2007 - 08 a global financial crisis unfolded which overtime affected the lives of many individuals in the developed world one way or another.

A consequence of this crisis was a reduction in public service funding from central to local government. This reduction meant that local authorities across Wales had to make sure that maximum benefit was achieved from each pound spent. At the same time as local government was expected to realise savings in service delivery costs additional duties were being placed on local authorities by central government, with an increased emphasis on improving outcomes for residents.

Between 2011 and 2015 Denbighshire County Council cut £20m from its expenditure by removing inefficiencies, bureaucracy and management costs. Throughout this time frontline services were protected wherever possible. Despite achieving these savings the austere global economic climate meant that public spending would be subject to severe cuts for the foreseeable future. As a result Denbighshire County Council had to plan for a further £17m worth of savings for the period between April 2015 and March 2017. Therefore, with the 'easy' less controversial efficiencies already realised, unpopular decisions had to be taken if the Council was to make the additional savings and live within its means.

With a view to achieving this the Council needed to review its activities and focus on what was really important. To do this it had to take the decision that it could no longer deliver the full range of services it had delivered in recent years. Whilst Denbighshire, like other councils, was obliged by law to deliver some services, called 'statutory' services i.e. aspects of social care and education services, there were other services, classed as 'discretionary' services, which authorities could choose whether or not they delivered them and to what extent i.e. music services to schools, benefits advice services.

When the new Council was formed in 2012 it agreed a very ambitious Corporate Plan for its term of office, from 2012 to 2017, comprising of seven corporate priorities. The extent of the financial savings which the Council had to make had the potential to seriously jeopardise its ambition to deliver this Plan. Acknowledging this risk, councillors and officers adopted an approach to ensure that the majority of the Plan could be delivered within the original timeline, with the timescale for only a few elements of the Plan being revised. In order to achieve this the Council decided that it would focus on delivering what it had to deliver as efficiently as possible and to enter into agreements with partners to deliver high quality services on its behalf in areas where it was not able to continue to deliver services itself.

With a view to achieving this a two year budget setting process for the 2015/16 and 2016/17 financial years, called 'Freedom and Flexibilities', was established. As part of this process councillors reviewed all service provision and were asked which discretionary or above statutory-minimum services they thought were important for the Council to deliver itself and which ones it should consider withdrawing from delivering. These decisions were not easy decisions to take as these services were

valued by residents and by the Council. Part of the decision-making process for considering whether to withdraw from delivering some services included exploring potential alternative service delivery methods.

As part of the 'Freedom and Flexibilities' process a communication and engagement exercise with residents was undertaken, this exercise was called 'Cutting Our Cloth'. The objective of the 'Cutting Our Cloth' exercise was to explain to residents why unpopular decisions had to be made, from which areas the Council was proposing to reduce funding or withdraw services, and what the Council could do to support organisations who might be able to take over the provision of some services.

Comprehensive impact assessments had been undertaken on all projects included in phases 1 and 2 of the 'Freedom and Flexibilities' exercise to aid elected members to make informed decisions. The extent of these impact assessments ranged from assessing the impact of each saving or withdrawal of service on communities, partner organisations, staffing skills and levels, health and safety, performance, the Council's reputation, poverty, biodiversity, carbon footprint, and equalities etc. Whilst the impact assessments were an attempt to anticipate and plan for all eventualities it was accepted that there would be unforeseen problems and unintended consequences which would come to light as the budget savings were implemented. For that reason Performance Scrutiny Committee, in October 2014, decided to establish a task and finish group to evaluate the actual impact of the Council's budget savings on the authority and on communities in Denbighshire. The Committee was keen to understand whether the impact on residents had been as anticipated or if it had been better or worse than originally thought. It was also keen to know if other factors or providers had come into play as a result of the reducing availability of Council funds.

Membership

The task and finish group was named the 'Cutting Our Cloth Task and Finish Group'. To ensure that it adopted a holistic approach to assessing the impact of budget decisions on the county's residents its membership was drawn from each of the Council's three scrutiny committees, two representatives from each Committee. Each committee was also asked to appoint substitute representatives to serve on the task and finish group and to ensure when appointing that the Group's membership was as politically and geographically representative of the Council as possible.

As the task and finish group would meet periodically for approximately two years it was inevitable that committees' representatives would change during that period. Listed below are the names of those councillors who served on the Group as members or substitute members at some point during the two year period:

Councillors Huw Hilditch-Roberts (Chair), Joan Butterfield, Jeanette Chamberlain-Jones, Martyn Holland, Rhys Hughes, Win Mullen-James, Dewi Owens, Arwel Roberts, David Simmons, Joe Welch and the late Richard Davies.

The task and finish group was supported in its work by the Corporate Executive Team (CET), the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) and other officers relevant to each inquiry the Group was undertaking. Administrative support was provided by officers from Democratic Services.

Terms of Reference

The sphere of the Group's work was to examine any budget savings included in the Freedoms and Flexibilities/Cutting Our Cloth process, having particular regard to those identified as having either a high or a very high reputational risk associated with them. Its terms of reference permitted the Group to call before it any Lead Cabinet Members, Heads of Services and other relevant officers it required for its review. The main objectives of the Group's work was to:

- examine the impact of the budget cuts on residents and communities;
- identify key messages from its work to feed into the 'Cutting Our Cloth' communication strategy to inform residents and stakeholders of the actual impact of the cuts; and
- identify lessons learnt from the 2015 to 2017 budget setting process and make recommendations for future budget setting processes.

The terms of reference also stipulated that the Group should report its findings to Performance Scrutiny Committee in due course.

Number of meetings held

Between June 2015 and February 2017 the Group held five meetings. Whilst savings from services came into effect on 1 April 2015 the Group could not start assessing any impact immediately as there would not be a sufficient evidence base to substantiate the actual impact of the cuts for a number of months.

Selection criteria and methodology for undertaking each review

When selecting savings or service withdrawals for examination the Group considered the extent of the proposed impact of the saving i.e. geographically; whether it impacted differently on different groups i.e. residents or businesses, staff etc.; whether initially the Council or a service's performance was deteriorating, or whether the number of complaints were increasing substantially.

The way evidence was gathered was tailored to the issue being reviewed (see details of individual reviews which follow).

Topics/savings examined

The first review undertaken by the Group related to **the Transfer of the Services provided the by Council's former Welfare Rights Unit to the Citizens Advice Bureau**. The transfer of this service had drawn considerable negative media interest, particularly in the north of the county. Hence the Group's reason for selecting it as one of the first detailed examinations it would undertake in October 2015, six months following the initial transfer of the service.

This initial examination of the transfer of the services previously provided by the Council's former Welfare Rights Unit (WRU) to the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) included reviewing the draft Service Level Agreement (SLA) between the Council and the CAB, the targets set for the delivery of the new service and the quarterly monitoring arrangements for delivering services covered by the SLA. Amongst the evidence provided to the Group was feedback from customer satisfaction surveys.

At the conclusion of this initial review, whilst acknowledging that it was still early on in the transfer process and not all services had yet been transferred to the CAB (but also noting that no formal complaints had been received since the CAB had started providing the advice service) the Group was generally satisfied that there was a robust system in place to monitor the contract with the CAB. It was also content that all performance indicators were demonstrating that the service experience for the customer was a positive one. Assurances were given that the Council would act promptly if any concerns were raised with respect to the quality of the service provision, and that it would within the following six months be analysing which other services over and above the SLA requirements the CAB would be able to deliver.

Targets set within the SLA were monitored and reviewed regularly within the terms of the agreement to ensure that the service was continually improving and adapting to deliver the services users wanted, services aimed at moving people on to better outcomes. To ensure that the new service model continued to deliver a quality service, which adapted to new requirements, the Task and Finish Group decided to undertake a further review of the delivery of the SLA during the summer of 2016.

This review took place in July 2016 when the Group examined a number of documents, including the Contract Service Specification, details of the contract value, Service performance information and a list of all projects the CAB was supporting/facilitating in Denbighshire. Evidence was provided that regular contract and performance monitoring had taken place since the CAB had assumed responsibility for delivering financial advice services to Denbighshire residents. All performance indicators were demonstrating that the service experience for all customers was a positive one. It was also pleasing to understand that no formal complaints had been received in relation to the advice service since it had been provided by the CAB.

Whilst the Council's own Welfare Rights Unit had continued to operate for part of the 2015/16 year, prior to the CAB assuming full responsibility for delivering the financial advice service, the CAB's performance in delivering against the SLA was very positive and was continuing to improve. As an organisation the CAB was attuned to changes to the benefit system and was consequently continuously 'horizon-scanning' with respect to forthcoming welfare changes.

The Group commended the CAB's flexible approach to delivering services for the Council. It was evident that its approach towards delivering its business was to try and ensure the best outcome possible for the resident. Whilst its main office for Denbighshire was in Denbigh it also had offices in Rhyl and Ruthin and offered outreach services in Corwen, Llangollen and Prestatyn, as well as visiting people in their own homes. In Rhyl the CAB had established an outreach service at the One Stop Shop (OSS) in the town's library and contracted some work to the Rhyl Benefits Advice Shop to undertake on its behalf. It was also willing to offer advice during evenings and weekends if necessary. The organisation could also make provision to undertake interviews in private within their own offices, in the county's libraries or in people's own homes.

As an organisation the CAB was continuously exploring opportunities to expand its services to include different kinds of services i.e. at that time they were due to start

offering financial planning information and advice to Denbighshire County Council staff during work time.

The Authority itself had realised unanticipated benefits through having the CAB undertake financial advice services on its behalf, which had assisted it with its work and helped it deliver more holistic services to residents. An example of this was the CAB's expertise in establishing the root of individuals' financial problems, this in turn helped the Council to signpost those individuals to the most appropriate support and benefits available to them to assist them and their families out of adversity.

At the conclusion of this review the Task and Finish Group formed the view that the partnership between Denbighshire County Council and the CAB for the provision of financial advice services was exceeding the original expectations. There had been a positive impact on the community as a more holistic service was now available to residents across the county than had previously been available through the former WRU. In reaching this conclusion the Group acknowledged the contribution of Denbighshire CAB's Chief Executive in ensuring the success of the new service and in making sure that both the CAB and the Council was working effectively together to improve outcomes for residents.

Another service delivery model change which was examined by the Group early on during its deliberations was the partnership agreement between the Council and CIVICA for delivering the **Revenues and Benefits Service**. The Council had chosen this option as its preferred model for delivering revenues and benefits services for the future in a bid to reduce costs whilst safeguarding the employment of staff working in the Service.

During its examination of the impact of the partnership, established in April 2015, evidence was received of the monthly performance monitoring undertaken by the partnership's Operations Board. Since the Service had been transferred over to CIVICA there had not been an increase in the number of complaints received in relation to the Service provided. For the customer, the journey when making a claim remained the same as it had previously when the Council provided the service.

Plans were in the pipeline for significant reconstruction work to be undertaken at Russell House, Rhyl to accommodate CIVICA's plans to deliver an efficient service and to eventually grow its business in the county. Evidence was available at that point in time, in October 2015, that the partnership was already looking after other local authority accounts without any adverse impact on services to Denbighshire residents or the authority itself.

Whilst there had been minor issues with the new telephony system not being fully operational from the beginning, which had impacted on the Service's ability to offer an advanced self-help menu to callers, this had not adversely affected the services it delivered. In future, it was anticipated that more of the Service's facilities would be delivered digitally, at home or in self service centres at One Stop Shops.

Having had regard to all the evidence presented to it the Task and Finish Group was satisfied that the impact of the change in the service delivery model on residents and communities in Denbighshire had been negligible, as the majority of residents would probably have been unaware that the service model had changed - as the services

provided to them remained the same as when they had been delivered by the Council. The impact on staff on the whole had been positive as redundancies had been avoided and their terms and conditions of employment had been maintained. For the Council there had been a positive impact as it had achieved a revenue saving of £220K per annum by entering into a partnership agreement with CIVICA to deliver revenues and benefits services.

Further consideration of the effectiveness of the Council's partnership with CIVICA for delivering Revenues and Benefits Services to residents was considered by Partnerships Scrutiny Committee at its meeting in January 2017. The report for that meeting can be viewed by following the link below:

<https://moderngov.denbighshire.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=268&MId=5365&LLL=0>

Service areas where residents are more likely to notice changes in performance or service delivery methods and consequently have a higher element of reputational risks associated with them are those which are visible to all residents and people who visit the county, such as services delivered by the Public Realm team. Hence the Task and Finish Group's decision to examine the **Impact of Streetscene Savings on Communities**.

Streetscene services play an important role in supporting the delivery of a number of the Council's corporate priorities, as improving the physical environment of the county by maintaining clean and tidy streets enhances residents' well-being, helps develop the economy and entices visitors to the county. The impacts of the savings in this Service was examined by the Group in December 2015.

For this particular review the Group contacted all councillors to ask them to bring to their attention any adverse comments reported to them with respect to the Streetscene Service since the £100K savings to its budget had been implemented. They also asked that they inform them if they were aware of any residents or community groups which had started to work together in a bid to keep their neighbourhoods neat and tidy. A similar request for evidence was issued to the public via social media.

A handful of responses were received to both the above requests for evidence

As part of its evidence gathering the Group was advised that the majority of the savings had been achieved by reviewing the Service's Sweeping Fleet and devising alternative ways of delivering the service on the ground. Previously the Sweeping Fleet had operated 9 mechanical street sweepers, a number of which were aging and costly to repair. Sweeper work schedules were set rigidly regardless really of a need for the work to be undertaken, sometimes this led to re-sweeping occurring unnecessarily.

With a view to modernising the Service and making it a more flexible and adaptable, one that could support the delivery of the Council's vision, two of the older sweepers were kept whilst the remaining 7 were replaced with 3 new machines. The charge hands and drivers of these vehicles were empowered to take decisions, based on

their knowledge of their local area on where needed sweeping etc. Councillors had received favourable reports about how this approach was working in their wards.

The Streetscene Service had also adopted more flexible working practices. Some of its staff had been trained to operate different types of equipment across the Service. As a result more staff were now able to drive the sweepers and the machines were working out on the streets for longer periods. This had resulted in a reduction in overtime spending and on the use of agency employees.

No compulsory redundancies had been made, although some individuals had opted for voluntary redundancies, part time working or seasonal contracts rather than work full-time. Staff were happy with the new working pattern and with the new flexible working practices which meant they had time off during the week. All changes had been implemented following discussions and agreement with the trade unions.

The Group acknowledges that there will always be complaints or problems raised in relation to Streetscene services, due to the types of services it delivers. It was therefore pleasing to learn that more joint working with other services was taking place with a view to delivering co-ordinated services. Examples of this include Environmental Enforcement staff highlighting dog fouling hotspot areas to aid prompt cleansing, and the Streetscene's work with the Planning and Public Protection Service to challenge landlords whose tenants are responsible for tipping in alleyways etc.

It was pleasing to understand that there were around 14 groups of volunteers who worked with the Council on litter picking duties in order to keep the county clean and tidy. This form of partnership working was particularly effective as the volunteers know and understand their local areas. The Council's contribution was to provide training, health and safety advice, equipment etc. and collect the litter bags at the end of the litter-pick day.

It was anticipated that regular review of outsourced contracts, working practices and future technological developments would aid the Streetscene Service to deliver further efficiencies and an even more effective service to the public in future.

Having reviewed all the evidence presented to it the Group felt that whilst there was some evidence of occasional delays in service provision this was to be expected as a result of the loss of funding. Nevertheless the service was not failing as there were clear and open communication between residents and the Streetscene Service, and the Service was responding to residents' requests.

Another budget saving that attracted some considerable amount of unfavourable media attention was the decision to withdraw the funding to Gwasanaeth Ysgolion William Mathias Music Service (GYWMMS) who provided a **School Music Service** for the county. On this basis the Task and Finish Group thought that the impact of this particular saving on the county's pupils merited detailed examination. The funding for GYWMMS was withdrawn from April 2015, therefore during the summer of 2016 the Group assessed its consequences.

In late 2014 school music services across Wales were being reviewed as part of local authorities' budget setting processes. In the majority of cases funding for music in schools was cut and therefore a reduced level of provision was available for pupils

interested in extra curricula music tuition. Controversially at the time Denbighshire took a decision to terminate its service level agreement with the GYWMMS, with an undertaking that it would explore potentially viable options for delivering a school music service.

Following the Council's decision a tutor working with the GYWMMS took the opportunity to work with the Council to explore the potential of establishing a new co-operative school music service in Denbighshire. As a result of some detailed financial work, visits to co-operative school music services elsewhere in the UK, and negotiations with individual tutors the new Denbighshire Music Co-operative (DMC) was established. As the Council owned all of the stock of instruments in the County's schools (apart from those owned by individual pupils) it came to an agreement with the DMC to loan the instruments to the co-operative in exchange for it to maintain them for the authority.

During its consideration of the evidence, which included comparative costs details between the previous and the new service, the Task and Finish Group was informed that the agreement was working well. There had been an increase in the number of hours of tuition ordered by schools, this had made it possible for the loan, repair and maintenance of all Denbighshire County Council instruments to be made at no cost to individual pupils. The new Service had received favourable feedback from schools and there were, in July 2016, 46 tutors providing around 400 hours per week of music tuition to pupils in 56 Denbighshire schools, compared to 28 tutors delivering circa 200 hours per week of music tuition in 39 Denbighshire schools in April 2015.

Schools were now liaising directly with DMC to 'buy' in their services and as the majority of transactions were undertaken electronically administrative costs were kept to a minimum. As DMC's tuition charges for schools were now lower than those levied by GYWMMS, even though the tutors were being paid a higher hourly rate than previously, schools were realising better value for their money.

The success of the DMC model was attracting a lot of interest from other local authorities who were looking at alternative cost effective models for delivering school music services.

Confirmation was received that pupils who attend schools in the county's areas of high deprivation should have the same opportunities afforded to them as to those in more affluent areas to access school music services, as schools were able to utilise their Pupil Deprivation Grant (PDG) monies to buy in music tuition services.

DMC's services were available to all schools in the county. The decision on how many services to purchase would be up to each individual school i.e. some schools may have staff members who could provide the required support for eisteddfodau, school productions etc. whilst others would purchase them from DMC.

The co-operative also provided ensemble services. Since DMC had been established the number of ensembles in the county had actually increased. In addition, it provided opportunities for 16 and 17 year old students to receive paid work in supporting ensembles. Another individual had been given an opportunity to use his designer skills to promote the Service and launch a website. The Group was also pleased to understand that since the co-operative's establishment more pupils

than before were receiving music tuition in the county. There was also a wider choice of music tuition opportunities available to the County's pupils.

Following consideration of all the evidence the Task and Finish Group being aware that the savings required in relation to the school music service had been widely reported in the local press as being detrimental and one which would deprive the county's pupils of opportunities in field of music, concluded that the new model for providing music services to schools had actually resulted in a superior service which offered a wider range of opportunities and experiences to pupils at no extra cost. The Group paid tribute to Council officers, the Manager of DMC and her team of tutors and staff for their vision, diligence and determination in establishing a thriving service model.

Public engagement/feedback

While attempts were made to try and engage with the public as part of the Task and Finish Group's examination of the impact of the budget savings on communities, particularly in relation to the Streetscene service savings, very few residents actually engaged with the process. In total three residents forwarded evidence to the Group for its evaluation of the impact of this saving. The only other examples provided were those submitted by county councillors. Nevertheless, the Group acknowledge that the majority of residents with concerns would contact their local councillor in the first instance.

With respect of feedback from residents or service-users on the effectiveness of new or remodelled services, those were confined to evidence given by services of responses to their own feedback/evaluation requests. County councillors also reported verbally to Group members on their and their constituents' experience of the effectiveness or shortcomings of services.

Press statements/correspondence issued

Early on during the review the Task and Finish Group recognised that its work would take some considerable length of time to undertake, as the effects of savings to service budgets or the establishment of new service models would need a period of time to embed before an accurate appraisal of their long term impact on the community could take place. Due the length of time it would take the Task and Finish Group to undertake its work it decided that it would periodically issue press statements etc. on its findings to date. During the course of its inquiries the following communications were issued at the Group's request:

10 November 2015: Financial Advice Service Deemed a Success **(Appendix 1)**

25 November 2015: e-mail to Senior Leadership Team (SLT) and all councillors **(Appendix 2)**

6 October 2016: Denbighshire Co-operative Success Music to the Ears **(Appendix 3)**

The Group also felt that as well as highlighting to residents examples of how potentially detrimental budget savings had resulted in positive outcomes for communities that it would be only right for it to recognise the efforts of those involved

for their work in securing success. Consequently it wrote to certain individuals and organisations to formally record its gratitude to them.

29 September 2016: Letter to Chief Executive, Denbighshire Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) (**Appendix 4**)

29 September 2016: Letter to the Director of Denbighshire Music Co-operative (DMC) (**Appendix 5**)

Findings/conclusions and the benefits of the process

This was the first time that a Scrutiny task and finish group had been established in Denbighshire to retrospectively evaluate the impact of significant reductions in Council spending on services to residents. However, due to the severity of the cuts to local government funding in recent years, and for the foreseeable future, Scrutiny was of the view that undertaking a review of the actual impact of selected savings would assist the Council to plan for future budget setting processes.

During the 2015 - 16 and 2016 -17 financial years the Council has successfully achieved the majority of the savings and efficiencies it agreed as part of the Freedoms and Flexibilities/Cutting Our Cloth process. Only a few of the originally agreed budget savings are yet to be fully realised. In the main this is down to additional detailed work being undertaken to mitigate against any significant impact on residents and with a view to securing positive outcomes for service users, for example the on-going work of the separate task and finish group reviewing future delivery of adult in-house social care. This work will continue during the term of the new Council.

The Cutting Our Cloth Task and Finish Group selected a variety of budget savings or new service delivery models to review. Some of these savings or proposed new arrangements had attracted either negative media or member attention when approved, were controversial, entailed new ways of delivering services and working, or had the potential due to their public facing nature of reflecting poorly on the Council if the original assessments of their impact on a wide range of stakeholders had been misjudged.

Now that its work is concluded the Group acknowledges that not all aspects of savings to service budgets went as planned from outset, but any initial problems or pressures on communities were rectified as soon as was reasonably possible. Nevertheless, due to the scale of budget savings involved the Group concludes that in the case of the majority of the budget savings it reviewed the impact on communities has not been as detrimental as originally anticipated. In a number of cases, such as the transfer of the financial advice service to the CAB and the establishment of the cooperative for school music service, the actual outcomes for the service-users have been better than under the previous service. In both these examples residents have benefited from more holistic services which deliver enhanced outcomes for users and at a reduced cost to the Council.

The Group is firmly of the view that the thorough process followed for setting the budget for both above financial years, and the holding of a series of dedicated budget workshops for members, was a prudent and effective method and one which

should be used for future budget setting processes. It is also of the view that future budget savings or service delivery reconfigurations should be reviewed post their implementation through the Scrutiny process.

The Group believes that any future post implementation reviews would benefit from assessing the impact of savings etc. on residents and communities in line with the well-being goals of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

Press Release 10 November 2015

Financial advice service deemed a success

Denbighshire County Council says it is delighted with the financial advice service delivered by the Citizens Advice Bureau and the Benefits Advice Shop.

Since April, a number of compliments have been received by both the Council and the CAB, with no formal complaints received.

The CAB carries out a user satisfaction survey to assess how they are performing in relation to their financial advice service, with 100% of respondents stating they were satisfied in the way they were contacted and their case dealt with.

Key headlines:

- 44% were very satisfied with the way they were contacted, 31% extremely satisfied, 25% satisfied.
- 50% were extremely satisfied about the service they received, 43% very satisfied
- 25% said it improved their independence, 6% greatly improved.
- 62% said the service improved their quality of life.

Some examples of feedback:

- “Adviser is one in a million. Could not have done more for me. Much appreciated.
- “I don’t think you could have helped me any more than you did and would definitely come to see you again if I have any problems.
- “We were impressed by the speed of the service we received and by the lady who implemented this for us.
- “The two ladies who visited us to full out the long forms were wonderful. They made the procedure much easier for us and took away the stress of understanding some of the questions. Dad really enjoyed their visit as a social event too. He couldn’t believe that people were willing to give him so much help”.

Councillor Bobby Feeley, Cabinet Lead Member for Health and Well-being, said: “We have been delighted to see compliments coming in about financial advice services.

“Tackling poverty in Denbighshire continues to be important to us and we will continue to monitor the provision of financial advice services, to make sure that the impressive level of service received to date continues.

“The fact that the CAB is providing a quality service is no surprise to us in Denbighshire, as the CAB has been one of the Council’s key partners in assisting people to access the benefits available to them. We will continue to monitor the

success of the scheme, to make sure it delivers the best possible service for the people of Denbighshire”.

Note to editors: For further information, please contact the Destination, Marketing and Communications team, on 01824 706222

e-mail to SLT and all councillors 25 November 2015

Annwyl Gynghorydd/Dear Councillor,

Fel y gwyddoch mae'r Grŵp Tasg a Gorchwyl 'Torri'r Brethyn' ar hyn o bryd yn adolygu effeithiau'r toriadau cyllidebol ar breswylwyr y Sir ac ar ein cymunedau i weld os yw'r effeithiau fel a ragwelwyd, yn waeth neu efallai hyd yn oed yn well na ddisgwylwyd.

Yng nghyfarfod diwethaf y Grŵp craffwyd ar y trefniadau newydd o ran darparu y gwasanaeth cynghori ariannol (yr hen Uned Hawliau Lles) o dan adain Cyngor ar Bopeth (CAB). Yn dilyn ystyried y dystiolaeth, oedd yn cynnwys canlyniadau holiadur defnyddwyr, roedd y Grŵp:

- Yn hyderus fod system gadarn mewn lle i fonitro'r contract gyda CAB;
- Hyd yn hyn doedd yr un gŵyn wedi ei derbyn ers i'r CAB ddechrau darparu'r gwasanaeth cynghori;
- Hyd yn hyn roedd y dangosyddion perfformiad yn dangos fod y profiad o ddefnyddio'r gwasanaeth yn un cadarnhaol i'r defnyddiwr;
- Wedi derbyn sicrwydd y byddai'r Cyngor yn gweithredu'n ddi-oed pan y cyfyd unrhyw amheuon am safon y gwasanaeth a ddarperid;
- Wedi derbyn cadarnhad y byddai'r Cyngor yn dadansoddi beth y tu hwnt i ofynion y cytundeb gyda CAB roedd y gwasanaeth newydd yn ei gynnig dros y chwe mis nesaf;
- Wedi derbyn cadarnhad y byddai'r targedau o fewn y Cytundeb yn cael eu monitro a'u hadolygu'n rheolaidd trwy gydol oes y cytundeb er mwyn addasu'r gwasanaeth i ddarparu yn ôl gofynion y defnyddwyr;
- Byddai'r Grŵp 'Taclo Tlodi' yn ymchwilio i ffyrdd o addysgu pobl ifanc ar sut i drin a rheoli arian a chyllidebau yn y cartref.

Er mwyn sicrhau fod y gwasanaeth newydd hwn yn dal i ddarparu gwasanaeth safonol ac yn addasu i ofynion newydd mae'r Grŵp Tasg a Gorchwyl wedi penderfynu cynnal adolygiad pellach o'r Gytundeb yn ystod haf 2016.

As you are aware the 'Cutting Our Cloth' Task and Finish Group is currently reviewing the impact of the budget cuts on the County's residents and its communities, to assess whether the cuts' impact have been as predicted or whether they are actually worse or even not as bad as anticipated.

At its last meeting the Group reviewed the new arrangements with the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) for providing financial advice service (previously delivered by the Welfare Rights Unit). Having reviewed the evidence, which included feedback from a customer satisfaction questionnaire, the Group was:

- satisfied that there was a robust system in place to monitor the contract with the CAB;
- advised that to date no formal complaints had been received since the CAB had started providing the advice service;
- satisfied that, to date all performance indicators were indicating that the service experience for the customer was a positive one;

- assured that the Council would act promptly if any concerns were raised with respect of the quality of the service provision;
- assured that the Council would be within the next six months analysing what over and above the Service Level Agreement (SLA) requirements with the CAB the new service has been delivering;
- assured that the targets within the SLA would be monitored and reviewed regularly within the term of the agreement to ensure that the service was adapting to deliver what users wanted;
- advised that the 'Tackling Poverty' Working Group would be exploring ways of educating children on money/household management matters.

With a view to making sure that this new service is delivering a quality service which adapts to new requirements the Task and Finish Group also decided to undertake a further review of the SLA during the summer of 2016.

Cofion/Regards,

Rhian

Rhian Evans

Cydlynnydd Archwilio/Scrutiny Coordinator

Gwasanaethau Cyfreithiol, AD a Democrataidd/Legal, HR and Democratic Services

Ffôn/Tel: 01824 712554

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Denbighshire Co-operative success music to the ears

A music co-operative set up to provide an alternative service for schools has been praised by Denbighshire County Council for actually increasing participation and providing a wide choice of tuition for the county's pupils.

The Council announced in late 2014 that it would be cutting the funding provided to Gwasanaeth Ysgolion William Mathias School Music Service, as part of wider cuts introduced to the budget. Following this decision, the Council said it would explore an alternative provision and the Denbighshire Music Co-operative was set up in April 2015.

Over the summer, a Task and Finish Group set up by the Council to examine the impact of cuts has been looking at the music service and was delighted to hear that the co-operative has gone from strength to strength, with more pupils than ever before are now receiving music tuition in the county. Over 2,200 pupils are receiving lessons on a weekly basis on a range of instruments and vocally and the six ensembles in the county are continuing.

Denbighshire continues to loan instruments to the co-operative free of charge.

Councillor Huw Hilditch Roberts, Chair of the Task and Finish Group, said: "We have been looking at some of the bigger cuts introduced to understand their real impact on communities and the music service has been the latest issue under the spotlight.

"At the time the cut was introduced, there was concern that Denbighshire pupils would miss out on school music tuition, but the Council made a commitment to look at providing the service in an alternative way, whilst still making the financial saving.

"The music co-operative set up in 2015 is providing to be really successful and we would like to congratulate the whole team for their hard work, diligence and motivation in making the co-operative work, for the benefit of Denbighshire pupils and for turning that vision into a thriving business.

Councillor Eryl Williams, Cabinet Lead Member for Education, said: "We are delighted that there has been such a positive outcome to this issue which was resolved through such positive discussions between the Council and the music service.

"The setting up of the Co-operative means that so many of our children and young people are able to continue accessing the music lessons, creating a new generation of musical performers in the county.

"The Council has written to the Music Co-operative to congratulate them on their success".

Posted on Thursday 6th October 2016

Eich cyf / Your ref:

Ein cyf / Our ref:

Dyddiad / Date: 29 September, 2016

Rhif union / Direct dial: 01824 712554

Appendix
4



Ms Lesley Powell

Chief Executive,

Denbighshire CAB,

23 High Street,

DINBYCH/DENBIGH

LL16 3HY

Dear Ms Powell,

Provision of Financial Advice Services

As you are aware during recent years the Council has, due to central government cuts, had to look very carefully at the services it was providing to Denbighshire's residents. In order to live within its means and deliver a balanced budget, some difficult decisions had to be taken on which services it could afford to continue to deliver. Some of the cuts implemented resulted in a reduction in services whilst other services unfortunately had to be discontinued altogether. Whether it was a cut in service provision or a cessation of a service that was agreed the Council was keen to examine the long term effects of those cuts on residents and service users.

To facilitate detailed examination of the cuts' impact on the community a 'Task and Finish Group' was established. This Task and Finish Group, called the 'Cutting Our Cloth' Task and Finish Group – as Cutting Our Cloth was the name of the public consultation exercise on the Council's proposed budget cuts for the period 2015-17, has been studying the impact of various cuts for some months. During the autumn of 2015 and into 2016 the Group decided to examine the impact of the decision which resulted in the Council ceasing to deliver a Welfare Rights Service and outsourcing its delivery to an external provider.

During its examination of the evidence relating to the above decision it became evident that the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) as the new service provider had worked tirelessly to ensure that the services they were delivering for Denbighshire residents were a success. As an organisation that was attuned to changes to the benefit system it was continuously 'horizon-scanning' with respect to forthcoming

welfare changes. Now that the Service Level Agreement (SLA) between the Council and the CAB had been in place for 12 months the Authority had a clearer picture of the CAB's performance in delivering against the SLA.

Despite the fact that the Council's own Welfare Rights Unit (Unit) had continued to operate for part of the 2015/16 year, prior to the CAB assuming responsibility for delivering the financial advice service, the CAB's performance in delivering against the SLA was very positive and was continuing to improve during the current financial year. It was extremely pleasing to learn that no formal complaints had been lodged against the CAB for services it delivered for the Council. Other positive aspects of the CAB's work was the outreach service, already established in Rhyl and other areas of the county, the availability of evening and weekend advice sessions and home visits if necessary, and the financial planning information and advice service it was going to offer to Denbighshire County Council staff during work time.

The Task and Finish Group felt that the CAB's holistic approach to examining each individual's personal circumstances ensured that they were provided with the most appropriate support and advice to meet their own and their family's needs. The Group concluded that the service provided by the CAB was meeting and actually exceeding the original expectations. Residents were therefore being provided with a more holistic service which had the potential to refer them to an array of different services and support.

On the basis of their findings the Task and Finish Group have asked me to write to you on their behalf to congratulate you and your officers for your efforts, diligent work and commitment in ensuring the success of the new service and to wish you well for the future.

Yours sincerely,

Cynghorydd/Councillor Huw Hilditch-Roberts

Cadeirydd y Grŵp Tasg a Gorchwyl

Chair of the Task and Finish Group

Eich cyf / Your ref:

Ein cyf / Our ref:

Dyddiad / Date: 29 September, 2016

Rhif union / Direct dial: 01824 712554

[REDACTED]

Mrs Heather Powell,
Director, Denbighshire Music Co-operative,
Unit 1,
Speddyd Business Park,
Llandyrnog,
DINBYCH/DENBIGH
LL16 4LE

Dear Mrs Powell,

School Music Service

As you are aware during recent years the Council has, due to central government cuts, had to look very carefully at the services it was providing to Denbighshire's residents. In order to live within its means and deliver a balanced budget, some difficult decisions had to be taken on which services it could afford to continue to deliver. Some of the cuts implemented resulted in a reduction in services whilst other services unfortunately had to be discontinued altogether. Whether it was a cut in service provision or a cessation of a service that was agreed the Council was keen to examine the long term effects of those cuts on residents and service users.

To facilitate detailed examination of the cuts' impact on the community a 'Task and Finish Group' was established. This Task and Finish Group, called the 'Cutting Our Cloth' Task and Finish Group – as Cutting Our Cloth was the name of the public consultation exercise on the Council's proposed budget cuts for the period 2015-17, has been studying the impact of various cuts for some months. During the summer of 2016 the Group decided to examine the impact on the county's pupils of the Council's decision to withdraw from the Gwasanaeth Ysgolion William Mathias School Music Service (GYWMSMS).

It became apparent during consideration of the evidence relating to the decision to withdraw from the GYWMSMS that this particular decision had actually led to the establishment of a new organisation, the Denbighshire Music Co-operative. Since the establishment of the co-operative more pupils than before had been receiving music tuition in the county. In addition there was now a wider choice of music tuition opportunities available to the County's pupils.

Having reviewed all the evidence the Task and Finish Group concluded that the cut to the school music service, a cut which had been widely reported in the local press as a detrimental cut which would deprive the county's pupils of opportunities in field of music, had actually resulted in positive outcomes for pupils across the county as they now had a wider range of musical opportunities and experiences available to them at no extra cost. In effect they were now receiving a superior service to what had previously been received, a service that was also available and accessible to more pupils than ever before.

In reaching the above conclusion they acknowledged that this success could not have been achieved without your hard work and determination to realise your vision.

On behalf of the Task and Finish Group I, on behalf of the Task and Finish Group, wish to congratulate and thank you and your excellent team for all your hard work, diligence and motivation in making the co-operative work for the benefit of Denbighshire's pupils, and for turning your vision into a thriving service model.

Yours sincerely,

Cynghorydd/Councillor Huw Hilditch-Roberts

Cadeirydd y Grŵp Tasg a Gorchwyl

Chair of the Task and Finish Group