



POLICY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, YSTRAD MYNACH ON TUESDAY, 16TH APRIL 2013 AT 5.00 P.M.

PRESENT:

Councillor H.W. David - Chairman
Councillor Mrs. J. Summers - Vice-Chairman

Councillors:

L. Binding, D.G. Carter, C.J. Cuss, Mrs D. Ellis, J.E. Fussell, C. Hawker, Ms J.G. Jones, A. Lewis, C.P. Mann, S. Morgan, R. Saralis, J. Taylor.

Cabinet Members: Councillors C. Forehead (Human Resources and Governance/ Business Manager), D.V. Poole (Community and Leisure Services), K.V. Reynolds (Corporate Services).

Together with:

N. Scammell (Acting Director of Corporate Services and Section 151), D. Perkins (Head of Legal and Democratic Services), P.S. Evans (Head of ICT and Customer Services), G. Hardacre (Head of Human Resources and Organisation Development), G. Williams (Monitoring Officer/Principal Solicitor), L. Donovan (Education and Leisure Personnel Manager), S. Pugh (Communications Manager), A. Main (Acting Housing and Council Tax Benefit Manager), S.M. Kauczok (Committee Services Officer)

Also in attendance:

D. Bezzina, Unison, representing the trade unions.

APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors G. Kirby and D. Rees.

WELCOME

The Chairman welcomed Dave Bezzina, Unison, who was representing all the trade unions at this meeting.

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest received at the meeting.

2. MINUTES - 5TH MARCH 2013

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 5th March 2013 (minute nos. 1 - 10, page nos. 1 - 5) be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

3. CALL-IN PROCEDURE

There had been no matters referred to the Scrutiny Committee in accordance with the call-in procedure.

4. CABINET REPORTS

There had been no requests for any of the Cabinet reports listed on the agenda to be brought forward for discussion at the meeting.

5. REPORT OF THE CABINET MEMBERS

Councillor Mrs. C. Forehead, Cabinet Member for Human Resources and Governance/ Business Manager, gave a verbal report on the recent accreditation received by the Council in relation to its decision to implement the Living Wage.

Councillor K.V. Reynolds, Cabinet Member for Corporate Services, informed Members of the final figure for Council Tax in-year collection. The figure of 96.4% means that the Team has exceeded last year's result by 0.2%, which was at that time the best performance since Caerphilly CBC was formed in 1996. Members congratulated the Team on this achievement.

In addition, Councillor Reynolds informed Members that Council Tax's previous years' arrears show a reduction of £270k year-on-year. NNDR in-year collection was 96.4%, the same as last year but 0.3% short of the new target set by the Team. NNDR previous years' arrears show a small increase of £71k year-on-year. Overall, a strong set of results on previous years and in difficult times.

Councillor Reynolds then briefed Members on the specification for the new Customer First vehicle, which has been developed. Specialist suppliers have been invited to tender for the contract to build the vehicle and tenders will be evaluated and a supplier identified by the end of the month. Delivery of the vehicle is anticipated sometime in September with the service being operational in October. A visiting schedule is being developed with locations being selected on the basis of criteria such as levels of digital exclusion, car ownership and access to Customer Service Centres. During the next few months discussions will take place with local members and town or community councils for each location to identify suitable sites to park the vehicle. Each potential parking site will be checked by the Council's driving assessor using a similar vehicle.

Members thanked the Cabinet Members for their presentations and added their congratulations to the members of staff involved.

SCRUTINY REPORTS

Consideration was given to the following reports.

6. SHARED LEGAL SERVICES - SOUTH EAST AND MID WALES

Caerphilly CBC is one of ten Authorities participating across South East and Mid Wales in a project aimed at exploring the benefits that may be possible from a regional shared legal service. The project commenced in May 2012 following the appointment of a project manager, which has been funded by the WLGA. The project manager is based in CCBC's Legal Services, employed on a fixed term contract that will end in September 2013.

A baseline framework for a formal collaboration has been defined, which comprises a number of work streams, as outlined in paragraph 4.7 of the report. In addition to this a number of opportunities for development in the future have been identified and these are set out in paragraph 4.8.

Members were advised that it was not the intention of the project to make savings through compulsory redundancy of staff employed in the ten partner authorities. However, there could be implications for staff as the project develops and it is for this reason that the trade unions have been fully briefed. Officers will report further as the project progresses.

The Scrutiny Committee noted the contents of the report and that as the project develops further reports will be provided for Members' consideration.

7. DISCRETIONARY HOUSING PAYMENTS 2013/14

The report informed Members of the Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) allocation received from Central Government for 2013/14 and the proposed criteria that will be used to award these payments.

To help Local Authorities manage the impact of the Housing Benefit reforms announced in the June 2010 budget, Ministers agreed to increase DHP funding to £30 million in 2011/12 and to £60 million annually for 2012/13. The total funding available for 2013/14 is £155m. CCBC, like every other Council, is given a fixed amount each year by the Government to pay DHP's. The allocation that Caerphilly will receive for 2013/14 is £292,597. This has increased considerably in comparison to the allocation for 2012/13, which was £66,516.

Members were advised that arrangements had been made for a Members' seminar to be held on the recent welfare reforms on 24th April 2013. In terms of communicating the changes to tenants who may be experiencing financial hardship, information is provided on the Authority's website and Officers have contacted those who might be affected by the proposals to provide guidance on the information and support available.

The Scrutiny Committee endorsed the recommendation in the report that the Authority continues to allocate this small amount of funding in accordance with the guidelines.

8. SURVEILLANCE OF EMPLOYEES

The Chairman had agreed to a request that Mr D. Bezzina, Unison, address the Scrutiny Committee in respect of this item on behalf of all the trade unions.

The report responded to a request from Councillor Hefin David for details of surveillance undertaken on CCBC employees and the engagement of Conquest Surveillance to undertake such activity. Details were received of employee surveillance undertaken by the Authority, the legal framework for such activity, the process for agreeing employee surveillance, the background to the appointment of Conquest Surveillance and the associated costs and benefits. In addition, information was received on the surveillance operations undertaken by the Council under the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000.

It was noted that during the preparation of the report, the Authority's Internal Audit Section was asked to review the arrangements for employee surveillance. One of the findings of the review was that the engagement of Conquest Surveillance was not compliant with Standing Orders from a procurement perspective. As a consequence, arrangements would be made for a formal procurement process to be undertaken and no new employee surveillance cases would be agreed until this exercise had been completed.

Following a very detailed discussion on the content of the report and having regard to the views of the trade unions presented at the meeting, Members of the Scrutiny Committee unanimously recommended that: -

1. The content of the report be noted.
2. A formal procurement process be undertaken for a contractor to undertake employee surveillance and during this period surveillance remain suspended.
3. The Authority engage in detailed discussions with the trade unions with a view to the development of current robust procedures into an HR policy document which will be made available to all members of staff.

9. PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE COUNCIL'S RETIREMENT/SEVERANCE ARRANGEMENTS

The report informed Members of a project to consider possible options in relation to the Council's retirement and severance arrangements. Due to the detailed work that will be required from an employment and pensions perspective to introduce these arrangements, Members' views were being sought at an early stage to be able to develop these arrangements more fully in consultation with the trade unions.

Mr Bezzina, Unison, who had been invited to remain in the meeting for this item, confirmed that the trade unions were fully supportive of the principles involved and would welcome the opportunity to be actively involved in the process of drawing up the detailed arrangements of any proposed scheme.

The Scrutiny Committee unanimously endorsed the recommendations contained in the report as follows: -

1. The detailed work required to investigate the establishment of new arrangements, based on all the information contained within section 4 of the report be noted. The trade unions and employees will be fully consulted on the details of proposals brought forward.
2. A further report with the detailed requirements from an Employment Law and Pensions Law perspective will be brought to Members for approval with the arrangements proposed.

10. REQUESTS FOR AN ITEM TO BE INCLUDED ON THE NEXT AVAILABLE AGENDA

1. Councillor J. Jones requested information on the roll-out of the policy for 20 mph zones in the county borough. As this was an issue which falls within the remit of the Regeneration and Environment Scrutiny Committee, she was asked to submit the request to the Chairman of that Committee, Councillor D.T. Davies.
2. Councillor L. Binding referred to a previous request he had made for details of the roll-out of high speed broadband in the county borough. Phil Evans, Head of ICT and Customer Services, advised that he had been in discussions with BT and suggested

that he invite the Chief Executive of BT to the next meeting of the Scrutiny Committee to give an update on this matter.

11. INFORMATION ITEMS

The following reports were received and noted, without discussion.

1. Minutes of the Corporate Health and Safety Committee, 18th February 2013.
2. Minutes of the Caerphilly Homes Task Group, 21st February 2013.

The meeting closed at 6.36 p.m.

Approved as a correct record, and subject to any amendments or corrections agreed and recorded in the minutes of the meeting held on 4th June 2013, they were signed by the Chairman.

CHAIRMAN