



JOINT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MULTI-LOCATIONAL MEETING HELD IN PENALLTA HOUSE AND VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS ON THURSDAY 20TH JULY 2023 AT 5.00 P.M.

PRESENT:

Councillor G. Johnston – Chair

Councillors:

M. Adams, E.M. Aldworth, C. Bishop, M. Chacon-Dawson, R. Chapman, C.J. Cuss, D.T. Davies MBE, G. Ead, G. Enright, K. Etheridge, M. Evans, A. Farina-Childs, C. Forehead, J.E. Fussell, C. Gordon, D. Harse, T. Heron, D. Ingram-Jones, M. James, L. Jeremiah, A. Leonard, C. P. Mann, A. McConnell, B. Owen, T. Parry, M. Powell, D.W.R. Preece, H. Pritchard, J.A. Pritchard, J. Rao, J.E. Roberts, S. Skivens, C. Thomas, L.G. Whittle, S. Williams, W. Williams, K. Woodland

Cabinet Members:

Councillors S. Morgan (Leader of Council), S. Cook (Housing), E. Forehead (Social Care), N. George (Corporate Services, Property and Highways), P. Leonard (Planning and Public Protection), C. Morgan (Waste, Leisure and Green Spaces), J. Pritchard (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Prosperity, Regeneration and Climate Change), Mrs E. Stenner (Finance and Performance)

Together with:

C. Harrhy (Chief Executive), R. Edmunds (Corporate Director Education and Corporate Services), M.S. Williams (Corporate Director for Economy and Environment), S. Harris (Head of Finance and Section 151 Officer), R. Tranter (Head of Legal Services and Monitoring Officer), G. Jenkins (Deputy Director Social Services - Children Services), J. Williams (Deputy Director Social Services - Adult Services), K. Cole (Chief Education Officer), R. Kyte (Head of Planning and Regeneration), M. Lloyd (Head of Infrastructure), L. Lucas (Head of Customer and Digital Services), S. Richards (Head of Education Planning and Strategy and Head of Transformation), N. Taylor-Williams (Head of Housing), B. Winstanley (Head of Property), S. Ellis (Lead for Inclusion and ALN), S. Mutch (Early Years Manager), P. O'Neill (Senior Youth Services Manager), J. Pearce (Business Improvement Officer), L. Pine (Lead Education Welfare Officer), R. Roberts (Business Improvement Manager), P. Warren (Strategic Lead for School Improvement), C. Forbes-Thompson (Scrutiny Manager), E. Sullivan (Senior Committee Services Officer), R. Barrett (Minute Taker)

Non-Scrutiny Committee Members:

Councillors R. Saralis, J. Simmonds

RECORDING, FILMING AND VOTING ARRANGEMENTS

The Chair reminded those present that the meeting was being live-streamed and recorded and would be made available following the meeting via the Council's website – [Click Here to View](#). Members were advised that voting on decisions would be taken via Microsoft Forms.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors A. Angel, A. Broughton-Pettit, P. Cook, D. Cushing, N. Dix, C. Elsbury, A. Gair, A. Hussey, J. Jones, S. Kent, B. Miles, L. Phipps, D. Price, J. Reed, J. Scriven, A. Whitcombe, J. Winslade and C. Wright and D. Street (Deputy Chief Executive).

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest received at the commencement or during the course of the meeting.

REPORTS OF OFFICERS

Consideration was given to the following report.

3. CORPORATE PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT END OF YEAR REPORT 2022/23

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Performance introduced the report, which presented the Corporate Performance Assessment (CPA) for 2022/23 which is part of the Council's Performance Framework. The CPA, which was attached at Appendix 1 of the report, is a self-assessment of the Authority's progress across a wide range of information types and provides a summary of information and analysis for the period April 2022 to March 2023. The CPA forms part of the overall Council 'self-assessment' activity, and the Joint Scrutiny Committee were invited to discuss, challenge, and scrutinise the information in the CPA.

The Chief Executive provided an overview of the Authority's performance during 2022-23 and reminded Members of the challenges that the Council continues to face. The impact of the cost-of-living crisis, the post-COVID economic climate and humanitarian crisis has made this a very challenging operating environment. Members were advised that the Authority continues to face overwhelming demand for its services and is balancing these demands against the continuing financial challenges, with approximately £50m of budget savings needed over the next two years. Council has given a firm commitment to retain its services and its staff, and to do this, the Authority must work differently.

Members were reminded that this was the biggest organisational change that the Council has faced and will require some difficult decisions being made going forward.

The programme of change will ensure that the Authority remains fit for purpose over the longer term, and the emerging Corporate Plan to be considered by Council in the autumn will bring further synergy to the transformation programme through a shared set of priorities and outcomes for the next five years, aligning staff and finances and further reinforcing shared purpose and values.

The Joint Scrutiny Committee were provided with an overview of the key achievements and progress made across the Authority during 2023. Details of these were set out in the summary at Appendix 1 of the report. Members were advised that the past 12 months has seen significant progress across several areas aligned to the Corporate Plan objectives. Through the Corporate Performance Assessment and departmental performance assessments, the Authority fully understands and are addressing areas of improvement. Going forward the Authority will need to flex, focus and facilitate change, but CCBC are well-prepared to meet these uncertainties together as the Council continues to deliver together as Team Caerphilly.

The Joint Scrutiny Committee then received an overview from Officers regarding performance across each of their directorates (Economy and Environment, Social Services, Housing, Corporate Services and Education). Further details of the individual Directorate Performance Assessments were contained in Appendices 2-6 of the report. Members noted details of the Directors Self-Assessment – Learning Summary, including a general summary of performance, the key challenges and opportunities for 2022-23, what went well and what did not go so well and the reasons for both, the learning gained, the impact and difference made in delivering these objectives, and future actions planned to ensure that the directorate is meeting performance requirements. Officers placed on record their thanks to colleagues for their achievements during this challenging period.

The Joint Scrutiny Committee discussed the report and raised the following queries and comments in relation to performance across the respective directorates.

Social Services

A Member raised a query regarding the interaction and cooperation between Social Services and the Health Service in respect of hospital discharges. Officers gave assurances that the Council is working together with its partners, including neighbouring authorities and the Health Board to address the issues around hospital discharge. Members also received an overview of the new system of delayed pathways of care reporting, which allows the Council to identify any issues around an individual's discharge, develop an action plan to address these issues in a wider sense, and achieve the best possible outcome for individuals in terms of the most appropriate care.

Clarification was sought on the relationship between the Caerphilly Cares service and the Voluntary Sector. Officers confirmed that extensive discussions are being held between the Regional Partnership Board and the third sector to ensure they are able to secure as much grant allocation and Regional Integrated funding as possible and bridge some of these funding gaps. Members were also advised that a review of the Caerphilly Cares is planned, which will examine whether there is any duplication or overlap of services with the voluntary sector.

Education

A Member asked how the Authority measures and monitors school performance since the removal of the league tables. Members were advised that there has been a shift in

how performance is measured, and the Authority now uses a range of data to determine how effective a school is. The Authority looks at attainment within the context of progress, measures how learners perform at their individual starting points and measures the progress that they make on their educational journey. Attendance and exclusion data also allows the Authority to make qualitative evaluations around the provision and experiences that children receive and allows for a more nuanced approach in terms of understanding the effectiveness of a school. The Authority also examines the dialogue that it has with schools, such as professional discussions to gauge success and inclusivity, and now places more emphasis on wellbeing as a major part of learning and progression.

A Member referred to the new Centre for Vulnerable Learners (CVL) at Pontllanfraith and asked how much of a stepchange would this have for pupils requiring extra support. Officers confirmed that this would be significant in reinforcing the Council's vision around ensuring that all children and young people have their needs met in provision that is suitable and appropriate for them. It was confirmed that once the Centre is opened, Officers would be able to share more information about the progress that these children and young people are making.

A Member asked when behaviour support would come return to face-to-face sessions. Officers confirmed that a review of behaviour support has recently been undertaken, and they will be meeting with colleagues in the Behaviour Support Team in the new academic year to evaluate the outcome of that review and look at how the resource is best utilised. Further information would then be available following these discussions. It was emphasised that school support around wellbeing, welfare, and behaviour involves a range of departments, including the Educational Psychology service and the Education Welfare Service, with these departments working together to support schools with the issues that have been raised since the pandemic.

One Member highlighted the new Universal Free School Meals approach and stated that the Authority should be proud of the work achieved in rolling this initiative out to every primary school across the county borough.

Corporate Services

A Member asked what the Authority are doing to ensure the retention of staff, in view of the competitive salaries available for similar positions across other local authorities. Officers confirmed that the Authority has a robust evaluation process for all posts, and in cases where there are issues around recruitment and retention and the Council can evidence that other employers are paying more for the same job, there is the opportunity to apply a market supplement to the post to match the salaries of other organisations.

A Member asked if the productivity of staff working from home is monitored and gave examples of difficulties when trying to contact some departments. Officers gave assurances that all staff are monitored on their outcomes by way of a robust performance management system. In terms of phone calls, Members are encouraged to contact the Council's Contact Centre to ensure that these calls are properly directed and logged. It was also recommended that Members email Officers so that they have a written record of their enquiry. Members were also invited to contact the relevant Head of Service or Corporate Director if they are experiencing difficulties in reaching a particular service area.

Economy and Environment

A Member asked what the Authority are doing to address weed growth across the county borough. Officers explained due to austerity measures approximately £2m has been removed from the cleansing and grounds maintenance budget, however it was recognised that had been an impact on visual amenity as a result. Officers confirmed that the Council had reintroduced an additional weed spray for 2022/23, although mechanical sweeping had also been reduced as part of these savings which had impacted on weed growth in highways channels.

A query was received regarding public perception around highways repairs, and Officers explained that the Authority the maintenance of the highways network was a priority and included preventative maintenance, predominantly on the A and B roads, and assurances were given that the road network is generally in a good condition. However, the Authority also has around 70% of roads on the unclassified network, which includes all residential streets and lanes, which are not met to this degree, but roads with the highest usage will be targeted to maintain them to the best possible standard. Work is being done at both WG and UK level to demonstrate the issues around ongoing maintenance and the problems being faced for future generations in view of the many layers of tarmac deteriorating underneath the road surface. For now, the Authority's focus is to preserve the road network as much as possible and particularly focus on the high usage areas to ensure that the travelling public receive the best service possible.

A Member queried if grass cutting in playgrounds is being prioritised. The Joint Scrutiny Committee were reminded of the "No Mow May" initiative which was trialled this year and is now being reviewed. A further Members Seminar will be held later in the year regarding this initiative. It was noted that the grounds maintenance teams have been catching up with this backlog of grass-cutting, and they should be caught up by the end of the month and will then begin the second cut cycle.

A Member highlighted issues with littering across certain bypasses in the county borough and suggested that this is having a reputational impact on the Authority's cleanliness levels. The Member stated that this issue is exacerbated by falling waste from commercial skips and suggested there should be an enforcement process to make skip companies responsible for this issue. Officers countered this view and explained that these roads are difficult to clean due to the traffic management needed. They acknowledged that skip companies could contribute to this issue but explained that this issue is difficult to tackle and enforce and would require a multi-agency approach as only the police have the powers to stop a vehicle. There is no legal requirement for skip companies to clear routes and any onus would be on the skip driver themselves to clear fallen waste.

Housing

A Member asked what the Authority are doing to prevent homelessness as a result of the cost-of-living crisis and housing crisis. Officers explained that Caerphilly Homes' Tenancy Support Team aims to support those council tenants facing financial difficulties to help them retain their tenancy. This support can include signposting tenants to additional packages of support that may be available, and the Authority have been able to secure an additional £3m of benefits to address some of these cost-of-living pressures. Where individuals present as homeless, Caerphilly Homes have been able to support them by enabling them to find alternative accommodation.

A query was raised regarding empty properties and Officers outlined the work of the Empty Homes Team, who have brought 104 properties back into beneficial use over the past year. Members were invited to contact the team if they are aware of any

properties that might be suitable for this scheme. A Member also queried the use of bed and breakfast premises (B&Bs) as temporary accommodation and asked if the Authority were looking to provide alternatives, given budget cost pressures. Officers emphasised that B&Bs are used as a last resort, and Caerphilly Homes will firstly look to work with private landlords and its partners across the Caerphilly Keys initiative.

Having fully considered the report, the Joint Scrutiny Committee reviewed, discussed, challenged and scrutinised the Corporate Performance Assessment.

The Chair thanked the Chief Executive, Directors and Heads of Service for responding to the queries raised, and placed on record the Committee's thanks to all staff for the work that they do in continuing to deliver Council services, particularly in view of the challenges around austerity, post-Covid recovery, the cost-of-living crisis and budget savings.

The meeting closed at 6.36 p.m.